

# **Social Performing Groups and the Building of Community: Odin Teatret, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat Theatre**

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I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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## **Abstract**

This is a dedicated study of three performing groups with a particular social understanding of performance. Odin Teatret, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat Theatre have developed unique theatre practices that investigate art as an integrated component of everyday life. The actors' daily lives incorporate both artistic activities such as training, research, devising, and performance, and social projects such as cultural barbers, expeditions, and pedagogical programmes in a conscious attempt to engage with the wider social world. The Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat's work therefore extends beyond theatre and into the lives, traditions, and cultural practices of diverse communities around the world.

This approach to performance continues a legacy of art that has emerged specifically from Poland as a result of nationalistic and Romantic trends during the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, Poland's borders were erased by the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian Empires. Dividing the country for well over a century, these partitions introduced cultural, linguistic, religious, and political suppression, creating an atmosphere of defiant cultural preservation as the Polish population struggled to assert itself against their oppressors. Artists such as Romantic poets Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, neo-Romantic dramatist, poet, and painter Stanisław Wyspiański, and, in the twentieth century, directors such as Juliusz Osterwa and Jerzy Grotowski, contributed to a legacy of art that sought to examine and strengthen cultural identity, belonging, and community.

Drawing on the theories of Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu, Mikhail Bakhtin, Emile Durkheim, and Ferdinand Tönnies, this study proposes that the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat can be considered not only as performing groups but as social groups.

Bound together through artistic principles that both define them as unique groups and shape the way in which they interact with the world, these social performing groups represent three unique performance practices devoted to exploring the social connections that connect people in mutual respect and understanding.

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The research presented here is the result of the immense generosity of Odin Teatret, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat Theatre. My thanks to Eugenio Barba and the actors of the Odin for welcoming me into their theatre, and for sparking a desire to learn more about theatre's relationship with the world; to Włodzimierz Staniewski and the actors of Gardzienice, specifically Mariusz Gołaj and Joanna Holcgreber, and archivist, Katarzyna Goluch, for their patience and support during each of my visits; and to the members of Song of the Goat, Grzegorz Bral and Anna Zubrzycki, actors Ewan Downie, Gabriel Gawin, Rafał Habel, Kacper Kuszewski, Ian Morgan, Anu Salonen, and staff Katarzyna Maicher, Marianna Wasik, and Pani Ula, for opening their doors to me, for sharing their work so graciously, and for accepting me as a member of the family. Thank you.

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Finally, to my parents, my new extended family, and, especially, my husband, for their enduring patience, love, and encouragement. All of them will be happy to have me back.

### **A note on transliteration**

This thesis adheres to the Polish alphabet for names and places in order to present the proper spelling for the people, cities, and plays discussed in this research. This is with the exception of Czesław Miłosz, who transliterates his name in his own publications. When providing titles of performances, I first introduce the English translation before providing the original Polish title. When not indicated, translations are with the assistance of Adela Karsznia and Robert Przekwas.

## **Introduction**

This thesis is an examination of performing groups who are dedicated to the creation of theatre not only as an artistic activity, but as a social practice. As an art form, theatre is a product of the social world. Composed by actors, directors, writers, and designers with the specific intention to engage with an audience, performance is embedded in social material. From experiences and relationships to emotions, beliefs, and actions, these essential components of our lives contribute to the way in which we function – and create – in the social world.

Beyond this, however, theatre is social because it brings people into contact with one another. Whether an improvised comedy sketch or the revival of a nineteenth-century play, the act of performance involves some form of relationship between the actors and the audience. Together, through a constant exchange of socially agreed upon signs – in the form of words, movement, costumes, and music for the actors, and applause, concentrated silence, or vocal dismay from the audience – each group responds to the other, creating a dialogue as both groups respond consciously and unconsciously to one another.

At the centre of this study are three performing groups whose work has intensified the social relationships within the theatre. Through a rigorous training, devising, and performance process, Odin Teatret, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat Theatre have each developed a theatre practice that is an integrated component of their actors' everyday lives. Understanding each actor not only as a performer but as a social being connected to the larger social world, these three groups have dedicated their work to investigating and strengthening the bonds that bring people together in community.



In order to examine the artistic and social function of these three groups, it is necessary to situate their work within a wider sociopolitical, historical, and artistic context. The *Odin*, *Gardzienice*, and *Song of the Goat* represent three generations of performance practice rooted in a specifically social understanding of art that developed from the nationalistic and Romantic movements in Poland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Empowering minorities and marginalized groups across Europe, these movements had particular resonance in nineteenth-century Poland, whose borders had been dissolved in three separate partitions between 1773 and 1795 by the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian Empires.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, Poland had been an expansive territory that was home to a wide range of ethnic and cultural groups, including not only Poles, but Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Germans, Slovaks, and Jews. The partitions, however, subjected this otherwise ethnically and culturally diverse population to aggressive programmes of assimilation. By making people critically aware of the social, religious, political, linguistic, and cultural distinctions that identified them as unique communities, the partitions marked the early stages of development of a unified cultural and national identity for a population that had not previously considered itself ‘Polish’.

This gradual development of a cultural or national ‘Polish’ identity was by no means a clearly defined process. As Elwira M. Grossman points out, “cultural identity is a constantly changing, unstable product of various signifiers which are inter-dependent elements of a symbolic order constituting an important part of cultural mythology” (Grossman, 2002: 15). By preventing diverse ethnic groups from practicing their own cultural traditions, the partitions in fact precipitated the subscription to the wider, more

unified ‘cultural mythology’ of what may be understood in contemporary Europe as ‘Polish’ identity.<sup>1</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Polish artists, intellectuals, scholars, and politicians –all of whom had fled or been exiled following a series of failed rebellions against the partitioning powers – were at the forefront of developing a more unified understanding of Polish culture and identity. Settling largely in Paris, these members of the elite continued to fight against the partitions through debates, discussions, exhibitions, articles, lectures, and poetry. This study specifically traces the development of socially engaged art through the dramatic verse of Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) and Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), and through the plays of neo-Romanticist, Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907). The works of these men, such as Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve (Dziady)*, Słowacki’s *Kordian*, and Wyspiański’s *Akropolis*, were to have a profound effect on the future development of theatre in Poland. Depicting nostalgic villages and landscapes, rousing tales of heroes and battles, and tragic, mythological, and dream-like stories, these three artists infused their work with rich cultural and religious symbolism that sought to empower the divided Polish population with a sense of identity.

In the twentieth century, theatre directors Juliusz Osterwa (1885-1947) and Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) continued this artistic tradition. Dedicating their work to the exploration of theatre as a means through which to examine social, cultural, and national identity, both directors understood the performer not only as an artistic being, but a social individual connected to a wider network of social relationships and influences. Both

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<sup>1</sup> While Polish nationalism will be discussed further in Chapter Two, it is important to note at the outset that the concept of the Polish word for ‘national’ or ‘nationalistic’ – *narodowy* – has shifted since the nineteenth century. Brian Porter makes an important distinction between the “enacted Polishness (understood as a cluster of cultural practices)” of the nineteenth century, and the more modern perception of nationalism as a “vehicle for the exertion of social control and the establishment of mutually antagonistic identities” (Porter, 2000: 5-6). See Brian Porter (2000) *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*, New York: Oxford University Press.

directors contributed significantly to the development of the laboratory theatre tradition in Poland – a tradition that involves intense research into the physical, vocal, mental, emotional, psychic, imaginative, and social life of the performer, and has become an approach to performance where artistic principles are integrated components of the artists' everyday lives.

For Osterwa and his company, Reduta, which he established with Mieczysław Limanowski in 1919 following the First World War, theatre was a way in which to create an artistic group of socially engaged individuals whose sense of responsibility and obligation to others could serve as an example to the rest of society. Developing a rigorous training process which involved gymnastics, dance, textual and character analysis, and included extended periods of time touring their performances in rural villages, Reduta's performance practice was an attempt to establish a performing group as a socially responsible and engaged community.<sup>2</sup>

Forty years later, Grotowski began his work with the Laboratory Theatre. Working in the strained sociopolitical and economic environment in new communist Poland, Grotowski investigated theatre as a means to challenge actors and audiences alike to encounter deep and vulnerable aspects of themselves in order to create performance as a profound experience of human connection. In addition to his work with the Laboratory Theatre between 1959-1970, Grotowski's theatre work has included paratheatre, the Theatre of Sources, and the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera in Italy.

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<sup>2</sup> While Osterwa is regarded as a highly influential figure in Polish theatre history, it must be noted that his writings were coloured by often explicit anti-Semitism and misogyny. During his lifetime, his prejudices were unfortunately not rare, as demonstrated by Jan Gross in his controversial books: (2001) *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; and (2006) *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; and by Halina Filipowicz (2006) 'The Wound of History: Gender Studies and Polish Particulars' in *Poles Apart: Women in Modern Polish Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren, Indiana Slavic Studies Volume 15, Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, pp. 147-167.

While extremely varied in form, his work has consistently sought to reformulate the relationship between audiences and actors through visceral and intimate experiences that would encourage them to question their own upheld beliefs, principles, and ways of seeing the world. This study, however, focuses primarily on his work with the Laboratory Theatre and paratheatre, as these are the two periods of practice that have contributed most directly to the later work of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat.

While each of these three groups will be discussed in detail throughout this thesis, it will be helpful at present to outline their work as a means of introduction. The Odin was formed by Eugenio Barba in 1964. Based in Denmark, the Odin's work has drawn heavily on Barba's own experience working as Grotowski's apprentice in Poland. Between 1962-1964, Barba had an opportunity to witness the early development of Grotowski's work with the Laboratory Theatre. Upon leaving Poland, Barba established his own company with the intention to continue investigating the intense physical training he had observed.

From the beginning, however, Barba and the Odin struggled to gain acceptance for their avant-garde artistic vision. As such, the members of the Odin have evolved as a cohesive community, dedicated in every respect to the life and activities of the group. From training and performance to their practice of theatre anthropology, the third theatre, and barters – all of which will be discussed in Chapter Three – the Odin is driven by a strong desire to forge connections within and between largely marginalized artistic, social, ethnic, and cultural groups in order to generate a wider acceptance of individuality and diversity in the world.

Gardzienice was founded by Włodzimierz Staniewski in 1977. An actor with Grotowski in the 1970s, Staniewski's early artistic career was influenced heavily by Grotowski's paratheatrical work, which broke with traditional theatre by bringing audiences and actors together in a shared experience of human connection in the natural

world. For Staniewski, this work became too detached from the theatre itself. His work with Gardzienice therefore searches for the essence of theatre, which he believes lies in the interactions, expressions, gestures, actions, and practices of ethnic and cultural groups that maintain strong connections with their communities, traditions, and the natural world.

Gardzienice's earliest performances were built around the villages of rural Poland, which had suffered tremendously during and following the Second World War. Travelling on expeditions into isolated regions along the Polish borders, the actors exchanged stories, news, songs, and dances with the people they encountered. These experiences fed directly into the group's artistic practice, shaping performances such as *Sorcery* and *Avvakum*, both of which will be discussed in Chapter Four, that were rooted in the traditions and heritage of diverse ethnic communities.

In recent years, the group's work has changed focus. Moving away from the deep social interactions of their expeditions, Staniewski and the actors now devote their research to uncovering the origins of theatre in ancient Greece. The group's latest work draws on archaic texts, musical fragments, and images which they seek to revive through their performances. Both the earlier and the newer work will be discussed in this study in order to account for the life of this performing group as a whole. Within the framework of this thesis, however, special attention will be paid to Gardzienice's early work from 1977 until approximately 1993.

The last of the three groups to be considered in this thesis is Song of the Goat, which was founded in 1996 by Grzegorz Bral and Anna Zubrzycki.<sup>3</sup> Both former performers with Gardzienice, the two have continued to explore theatre as a profound experience shared between actors and audience. For Bral and Zubrzycki, however, their

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<sup>3</sup> Zubrzycki is her professional name – as opposed to the gender-specific 'Zubrzycka', which is customary in Polish language.

understanding of theatre has been enhanced by their own personal practice of Tibetan Buddhism. As a result, the Buddhist principle of compassion has become a defining characteristic of Song of the Goat's work. From the actors' practice of 'coordination', in which they train to follow a flow of energy between their bodies, voices, emotions, and imaginations to its powerful and alive performances that undergo a continual process of development, compassion underlines every element of the groups' practice as the actors attempt to connect strongly and intuitively with each other and with an audience at every moment in their work.

This practice of compassion is not limited to the actors' artistic work. The group's annual Brave Festival: Against Cultural Exile brings together artists and practitioners from around the world who continue their unique cultural traditions despite discrimination or marginalization. The ultimate aim of the festival is to give voice to often dying traditions and to celebrate diversity in an open and respectful environment. Compassion therefore extends through the social relationships within the group and into the social world as Song of the Goat creates environments in which people may connect with each other through a deeper experience of mutual respect and understanding.

The work of these groups can therefore be situated within both an artistic and a social context. For this reason, the present study proposes that the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat can best be understood not only as performing groups but also as social groups, bound together by the shared artistic principles, activities, values, and visions that define them as unique. In order to better understand the artistic and social function of these groups, the first chapter establishes a theoretical framework through which to examine their work as social performing groups connected to the social world.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Social groups can be defined by a wide range of characteristics, from ethnicity, religion, culture, and nation to occupation, politics, social class, age, and gender. An essential component of any social group, however, is that the members share a vested interest in the life of the group. Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968) argues that social groups are therefore defined by a sense of interdependence, solidarity, and “meaningful interaction” (Sorokin, 1962: 147) between their members. Regardless of whether a group defines itself by cultural, geographic, or artistic criteria, social groups can be understood as a collection of individuals who believe in the ideals that shape the group as a whole.

For Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), every group is defined by a unique set of characteristics that determine the way in which that group perceives itself and functions in the social world. He terms this the ‘habitus’, which is composed of experiences, values, beliefs, attitudes, tastes, preferences, and opinions that identify and place each group within its wider social structure. As Jeremy Lane elaborates:

‘habitus’ was employed in a...general sense to describe the whole series of bodily and cognitive dispositions which were both structured by past experiences and structuring of future action. The habitus represented a durable and transposable structure of dispositions, ...of ways of seeing and doing in the world, ‘a vision and division of the social world’ (Lane, 2000: 99-100).

In much of Bourdieu’s analysis, habitus is linked closely with class, where each group’s unique dispositions situate them in relation to one another in a socially defined world. With regards to the specific performing groups at the centre of this study, however, pursuing this aspect of habitus would require a fundamental shift in focus, and politicize the work of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat in a way that the groups themselves do not do. While the work of all three of these groups can be understood in a political fashion, their work is not explicitly political. As will be discussed in the ensuing chapters,

their artistic practices undoubtedly respond to sociopolitical environments but, for all three of these groups, class is not an issue that is raised or discussed. They are artists, who shape their lives and their engagement with the world through their artistic practice – practices, incidentally, that involve deep investigation into themselves not explicitly as political beings, but as human beings.

This is not to say, of course, that as individuals, they do not fit into a class structure. Certainly they do. Yet the focus of this particular study rests on how these groups perceive themselves with regards to the wider world and how they shape their practices regarding that world view. In analysing these practices, it is my aim to illuminate a strain of theatrical work that explores a human-to-human connection, using Bourdieu's concept of habitus to investigate the way in which human beings form bonds of community. As a social phenomenon, habitus therefore provides a valuable tool through which to better understand and examine the social nature of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat as social performing groups.

Because social groups exist in the social world, the specific characteristics that define them as groups determine the way in which they interact with others. A group's identity establishes a group 'language' that is composed of both verbal and physical signs, including everything from words, syntax, and intonation to gestures, actions, facial expressions, symbols, and inside jokes, that exist as the conscious – or unconscious – expression of that group's identity. In this way, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) asserts that every social group develops a system of signs that indicates the specific nature of that group's identity (Vološinov, 1973: 20-23).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The present study will adopt the stance presented by Katarina Clark and Michael Holquist (*Mikhail Bakhtin*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984) and Maria Shevtsova ('Sociology of the Theatre, Part Three: Performance' in *NTQ* 5.19, August 1989, pp. 282-300) that the works of V. N. Vološinov and P. M. Medvedev, published in the Soviet Union during the 1920s, were in fact penned by Bakhtin. Arguments for this case are overwhelmingly based on the similarity of tone, style, and theme between the works, not to



Despite the fact that Bakhtin's focus is primarily on words, which he considers to be socially formed verbal signs, his proposal provides a useful foundation upon which to explore the way in which people communicate with each other – an exploration that is vital when discussing the naturally dialogic art form of theatre. Bakhtin suggests that when two groups, each with varying sign systems, encounter one another with an intention to engage meaningfully with the other, they must find a way of communicating such that the signs specific to each group will hold meaning for the other.

During such an interaction, signs are therefore exchanged and adapted as the two groups learn to communicate effectively with one another. Referring specifically to words, Bakhtin explains that a verbal sign

provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. ...[It is] determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1981: 280)

Thus a dialogue or, for that matter, any meaningful interaction between two social groups, depends on the fluid exchange of the very material that represents and constitutes the identity of both groups. By coming into contact with others, our sign systems have the potential to transform, allowing for the possibility to expand our own understanding of ourselves and of those around us through the constant accumulation of new signs.

Bakhtin's understanding of the mechanics of communication brings our discussion directly into the theatre. As mentioned earlier, performance can – to varying degrees depending on the production – be understood as a dialogue between the actors and the audience. Regardless of whether or not a strong level of interaction is the intention during a performance, theatre as a social art form has the potential to create a space in which meaningful interaction may occur. Because the *Odin*, *Gardzienice*, and *Song of the Goat*

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mention, as Shevtsova points out, Bakhtin's reported admittance of his authorship of these texts shortly before his death in 1975 (Shevtsova, 1989c: 299f).

have devoted their performance practice to strengthening the social relationships inherent in theatre, they demonstrate performance's capacity to engender deeper understandings by instigating dialogues – through performance – between people of differing identities and sign systems.

## **Methodology**

The idiosyncratic nature of each of these performing groups has required varying levels of involvement from myself as a researcher, including different approaches, questions, and participation from group to group. As the first generation of the three companies, there is a wealth of material about the Odin that is easily accessible. Much of this material has been documented by Barba himself, who has spent a considerable portion of his efforts recording details of his relationship with Grotowski and outlining his theories of theatre in a vast quantity of articles and books. Additionally, there is extensive critical analysis available by such scholars as Ian Watson, Kirsten Hastrup, and Erik Exe Christoffersen.<sup>5</sup>

Due to the high volume of available material, the majority of my research on the Odin drew from existing sources. I did conduct onsite research with the company between May and June 2006, which involved meeting informally with Barba and the actors, witnessing rehearsals for *Don Giovanni all' Inferno*, assisting actors with props and costumes, participating in a street parade in the centre of Holstebro, cooking dinner for actors and staff, performing necessary household chores, and working closely with Assistant Director, Raul Iaiza (director of Teatro La Madrugada in Milan), as he transcribed music for the international musicians who were working on the project. The Odin is well-

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<sup>5</sup> See: Ian Watson (1993) *Towards a Third Theatre: Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret*, London: Routledge; and (2002) *Negotiating cultures: Eugenio Barba and the intercultural debate*, ed. Ian Watson, Manchester: Manchester University Press; Kirsten Hastrup (ed.) (1996) *The Performers' Village: Times, Techniques and Theories at ISTA*, Graasten: Drama; and Erik Exe Christoffersen (1993) *The Actor's Way*, trans. Richard Fowler, London: Routledge

accustomed to opening its doors to visiting students, scholars, artists, and other practitioners, and their base in Holstebro includes living facilities designed to accommodate long-term guests. As such, the Odin readily accepts visitors into its daily activities, allowing for an intimate understanding of the group's internal organization and day-to-day life.

My research on Gardzienice and *Song of the Goat*, on the other hand, required more extensive fieldwork. As mentioned previously, Gardzienice's work has changed drastically since the company's inception. Because this thesis focuses primarily on the group's earlier work, much of my research has drawn on existing publications, video documentation, and archives. Staniewski's book, *Hidden Territories*, which was written in collaboration with Alison Hodge, helped to create a picture of his own understanding and approach to Gardzienice's artistic process over the years.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the book's accompanying CD-ROM provided useful video documentation of the company's performances and training, including articles by Leszek Kolankiewicz, Albert Hunt, and Alison Hodge.

However, because this book was produced by Staniewski and Gardzienice, it does not offer the critical analysis necessary for a complete understanding of the company. For this reason, Halina Filipowicz's first-hand accounts of the group's early expeditions were invaluable, as were her descriptions and analyses of Gardzienice's earliest performances.<sup>7</sup> Paul Allain's research on Gardzienice has provided helpful resources and detailed descriptions of life in the village of Gardzienice, drawing on his own experiences with the company during the early 1990s.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Gardzienice's own archives offered

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<sup>6</sup> Włodzimierz Staniewski and Alison Hodge (2004) *Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice*, with CD-ROM produced by Arts Archives, London: Routledge

<sup>7</sup> Halina Filipowicz (1983) 'Expedition into Culture: The Gardzienice (Poland)', *The Drama Review* 27:1, pp. 54-71; and (1987) 'Gardzienice: A Polish Expedition to Baltimore', *The Drama Review* 31:1, pp. 137-163

<sup>8</sup> Paul Allain (1997) *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition*, Contemporary Theatre Studies, vol. 22, Amsterdam: Hardwood Academic Publishers. It is worth noting that Filipowicz provides an interesting discussion of Allain's work on Gardzienice – specifically his article (1995) 'Coming Home: The New

extensive materials, ranging from reviews, newspaper clippings, articles, and early carbon-copied manifestos, to hand-written plans for expeditions, lyrics of songs, drawings of maps and specific terrain, raw film footage, documentaries, and personal accounts of expeditions from the actors.

Although this thesis focuses primarily on the earlier work of Gardzienice, it was necessary to visit the group in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the company as a whole. My fieldwork was conducted in the village of Gardzienice on three separate occasions between 2008 and 2010. During these visits, I had the opportunity to witness the daily routine and current activities of the actors as a participant-observer by living onsite, attending performances, meeting informally with actor Mariusz Gołaj, and participating in lectures and physical training undertaken by the students of Gardzienice's Academy for Theatrical Practices.

Additionally, my understanding of the group was greatly enhanced through participation in the August 2010 KOSMOS Summer Intensive, a workshop designed to introduce young actors to the principles and techniques of Gardzienice. Over the course of ten days, I was exposed to a first-hand experience of their Academy's rigorous training programme, including ten to twelve hours days of demanding physical training, vocal work, communal meals, text work, and late-night rehearsals with Staniewski.

It must be noted that, as a researcher, it is difficult to gain more intimate access to the group's work. This has much to do with Staniewski's reluctance to engage with students and scholars whom he fears may make misleading comparisons between his work and that of Grotowski. This issue will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapter Four. After

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Ecology of the Gardzienice Theatre Association of Poland', *The Drama Review* 39:1, pp.93-121 – in her own work: Halina Filipowicz (2004) 'Shifting a Cultural Paradigm: Between the Mystique and the Marketing of Polish Theatre' in *Over the Wall / After the Fall: Post Communist Cultures Through an East-West Gaze*, ed. Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 164-180.

much discussion and deliberation, Staniewski declined to participate in the present study. He did, however, acknowledge that research could continue regardless of his or the actors' personal involvement.

My research has therefore relied on both existing historical and contemporary accounts, and on personal observations gathered from the fieldwork that it was possible to conduct. The intention of Chapter Four is to bridge the gap between the group's early period of work with the expeditions and their present focus on a more historical research into the rituals, traditions, music, and theatre of ancient Greece. In so doing, my aim is to present a broader understanding of the scope of Gardzienice's artistic and social life.

Fieldwork with Song of the Goat has been the most extensive. Prior to the publication of my own article and Maria Shevtsova's insightful interview with Bral and Zubrzycki, no scholarly examination in English has been published on this company.<sup>9</sup> This is due to a number of reasons. As a younger company, it has taken time for the group to establish a strong working practice and also for this working practice to be understood in the academic world. Within Poland, Song of the Goat is part of an experimental theatre scene and, within this context, maintains a devoted audience. Beyond this context, however, the group remains relatively unknown in Poland.

As for international recognition, this has taken time to develop simply because the group's productions are few and far between. To demonstrate this point, Song of the Goat has made only three major productions in over fifteen years: *Chronicles – A Lamentation* (2001), *Lacrimosa* (2005), and *Macbeth* (2008), with their very first production – *Song of the Goat - A Dithyramb* (1997) – regarded more closely as a work-in-progress. All four of these performances have toured, including visits to the United States (2005) and the UK

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<sup>9</sup> Anna Porubcansky (2010) 'Song of the Goat Theatre: Artistic Practice as Life Practice' and Anna Zubrzycki and Grzegorz Bral in conversation with Maria Shevtsova (2010) 'Song of the Goat: Finding Flow and Connection', *New Theatre Quarterly* 26:3, pp. 261-272 and pp. 248-260

(2010), and two separate appearance at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (2004; 2007). Most of the group's travels, however, have been to theatre festivals in Central Europe. Besides this, the group performs primarily at its space in Wrocław. While highly regarded within the more experimental theatre scene both in Poland and internationally, the work of Song of the Goat has remained relatively unknown and undocumented.

Another reason for the lack of information about this group is due simply to the fact that the company is very protective of its process. The way in which this group approaches its work is through a deep investigation of the actors' own emotional, physical, and imaginative experiences as they search to connect within themselves and with the larger ensemble on a continual basis within their training. For this reason, an outside presence during their training and devising process is generally regarded as intrusive and disruptive, and has the potential to prevent the actors from fully engaging with each other. Additionally, it must be noted that this spontaneous, intuitive nature of their work causes some difficulty for the researcher in finding words to describe what it is that the company does.

My account of Song of the Goat's work, as found in Chapter Five, attempts to verbalise my own experiences and observations of this company as an embedded researcher, accumulated between 2007 and 2010. During this time, I have had the privilege of working closely with Bral, Zubrzycki, all of the actors, and the staff in research that continues to the present day. The members of the group have involved me in a wide range of activities, which has included providing video documentation of the 2007 MA in Acting expedition to Siberia; volunteering for the Brave Festival between 2007-2009; attending performances of *Chronicles – A Lamentation* and *Lacrimosa*; participating in workshops; and involvement in the daily life of the group.

Most significantly, the group has allowed me to witness rehearsals during the *Macbeth* process, giving me rare access and insight into the way in which the group approaches creating its work. My relationship with *Macbeth* has continued throughout its life; since 2008, I have attended the performance well over twenty times in Wrocław, Warsaw, Manchester, and London. The opportunity to watch the development of this performance has provided me with an intimate knowledge of the continual evolution of Song of the Goat's performances as the actors work to respond actively to the live presence of every environment, situation, and person in the space on any given evening.

Admittedly, this research has been restricted by my own limited grasp of the Polish language. This means that I have had to rely on English-language resources where a Polish native speaker would have greater access to a wider range of materials, especially regarding the more contemporary discussions regarding Polish culture and identity.<sup>10</sup> The notable exceptions have been key Polish texts regarding Reduta and Gardzienice's artistic practices. Reduta is virtually unknown outside of Poland; at the time of writing only brief mentions of the group and their work are available in English.<sup>11</sup> Gardzienice's work, on the other hand,

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<sup>10</sup> Available English-language resources include: Halina Filipowicz (2004) op. cit.; and (2006), op. cit; Aleksandra Galasińska and Dariusz Galasiński (eds.) (2010) *The Post-Communist Condition: Public and private discourse of transformation*, Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture (DAPSAC) Vol. 37, series ed. Ruth Wodak and Greg Myers, Amsterdam: John Benjamins. For Polish language resources see: Maria Janion (1995) 'Czy bedziesz wiedział, co przeżyłeś' in *Literatura i demokracja: Bezpieczne i niebezpieczne związki*, Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, pp. 121-129; and (2007) *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna: fantazmaty literatury*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie

<sup>11</sup> These include: Kazimierz Braun (1996) *A History of Polish Theater 1939-1989: Spheres of Captivity and Freedom*, Westport: Greenwood Press, pp. 136-137; and Alison Hodge's 'Introduction' in Włodzimierz Staniewski and Alison Hodge (2004) op. cit., pp. 7-8. See also: Zbigniew Osiński (2008) 'Returning to the subject: The Heritage of Reduta in Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre', *The Drama Review* 52:2, trans. Kris Salata, pp. 52-74. A translation by Paul Vickers of Osterwa's letters, *Through Theatre, Beyond Theatre*, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, is forthcoming, although the original publication date of 2011 has recently been extended. Polish language resources used for this thesis include: Ireneusz Guszpit (2008) *Dwa teatry – dwa światy: dzień pierwszy*, *Konteksty* 62:1, pp. 63-68; Jan Ciechowicz (2008) 'Teatr w podróży. Wędrowanie jako poznanie', *Konteksty* 62:1, pp. 69-72; and Zbigniew Osiński (2003) *Pamięć Reduty*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria

has been documented in a variety of interviews, reviews, and in Staniewski's own words, as mentioned previously.<sup>12</sup>

While valuable in their own right, the English language accounts are supplemented significantly by the extensive research conducted by Polish scholar, Tadeusz Kornaś. His book, *Włodzimierz Staniewski i Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych: Gardzienice* offers a wide-reaching and detailed analysis of the company from its earliest years until 2004.<sup>13</sup> My access to these materials has been with the generous assistance of Adela Karsznia, translator and editor with the Grotowski Institute, and theatre artist, Robert Przekwas.

Regarding my own work as an embedded researcher with the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat, English was the primary language used to communicate. Barba and his actors are multi-lingual, speaking a mixture of Italian, Danish, and Norwegian, in addition to English. Most of the actors with Gardzienice, including Staniewski, speak at least some English, although the group works primarily in Polish. Song of the Goat, on the other hand, works primarily in English.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study does not intend to be a comparison between these three performing groups. Their work is idiosyncratic and must be analysed as a direct product of each group's unique habitus, to use Bourdieu's term. Instead, the present analysis attempts to illuminate three diverse artistic practices that resonate strongly with the social world. It must be noted that no thorough examination in English has been produced as yet that traces the performance

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<sup>12</sup> See: Włodzimierz Staniewski and Alison Hodge (2004) op. cit.; Halina Filipowicz (1983) op. cit.; (1987) op. cit.; Paul Allain (1997) op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Tadeusz Kornaś (2004) *Włodzimierz Staniewski i Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych: Gardzienice*, Kraków: Homini



practices emerging from the Polish laboratory theatre tradition.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, my research aims to account for the continuing artistic development of a legacy initiated by Osterwa and Grotowski by highlighting the work of three performing groups that have firmly built upon this tradition.

Because of this particular framework, there are many lenses through which one could examine the work of these groups – and in fact the wider laboratory theatre tradition in Poland – that have not been employed in this thesis. As mentioned earlier, one of these is a political lens, analysing the position the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat hold with regards to the wider class structure in their societies. Religion is another lens through which one could investigate these groups' work, although this topic would be most illuminating in the discussion of Polish sociocultural history and artistic development, as Dariusz Kosiński has done with his book *Polski teatr przemiany*.<sup>15</sup>

Gender would also be an extremely valuable lens in examining both the social dynamics within these three performing groups, and the wider tradition of laboratory theatre practice in Poland. Grossman and Filipowicz, among other scholars, have noted the significant imbalance of gender in Polish discourse, noting that

Polish women's social and political inferiority [has been] designed for them by the male-dominated society with a strong Catholic foundation. They expose gender as the most effective mode of repression, revealing at the same time that women are

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<sup>14</sup> This is with the exception of Tadeusz Kornaś (2007) *Between Anthropology and Politics: Two Strands of Polish Alternative Theatre*, ed. K. Szustow, Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny (The Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute). This short book accounts for a wide range of theatres that have, on the one hand, continued to develop their work from Grotowski's own explorations – Kornaś' 'anthropology' strand of alternative theatre – and on the other, the political theatres developing from the student theatre movement in the 1950s and 1960s in Poland. While brief, this particular account offers a valuable glimpse into the long tradition of alternative theatre in Poland. Kornaś offers a wider survey of the laboratory theatre tradition, specifically influence Gardzienice, in: Tadeusz Kornaś (2004) op. cit., pp. 25-49. See also: Dariusz Kosiński (2007) *Polski teatr przemiany*, Wrocław: Instytut im. Jerzy Grotowskiego, scheduled to be published in English translation by Black Mountain Press, although no date is forthcoming.

<sup>15</sup> Dariusz Kosiński (2007) op. cit.

allowed to criticise but not to challenge or subvert their current status quo.  
(Grossman, 2005b: 114)<sup>16</sup>

As this quote indicates, gender inequality is serious concern in Poland that demands to be addressed and fought. In structuring this thesis, priority has been given to the social processes of community: how people communicate with one another, how they develop an understanding between each other, and how performance has evolved within a particular tradition to emphasise and investigate this. Certainly, issues such as gender and religion influence the way in which human beings understand and connect with one another. However, these important perspectives have not been possible to include in the present study because they fall beyond the scope of the present study.

Within the discourse and practice of the three performing groups at the centre of this study, it must be noted that, as companies led exclusively by male directors, a certain power structure – and gender-biased discourse – does exist within these groups.

While promoting such strong ideals as tolerance, respect, and diversity, it is remarkable that it is still rare for women to be fully and equally integrated into the work's rubric.

Besides Osterwa's somewhat extreme views as mentioned previously, it should be noted that other directors included in this study do maintain a more generic masculine-dominated terminology in their discourse. Grotowski regularly refers to actors with a masculine bias.<sup>17</sup> In Staniewski's case, Grossman points out that, although a large number

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<sup>16</sup> See: Elwira M. Grossman (2005b) 'Who's Afraid of Gender and Sexuality? Plays by Women', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15:1, pp. 105-116; Halina Filiowicz (2006), op. cit.; and Natalia Krzyżanowska (2010) 'Denying the right to speak in public: Sexist and homophobic discourses in post-1989 Poland', in *The Post-Communist Condition: Public and private discourse of transformation*, eds. Aleksandra Galasińska and Dariusz Galasiński, op. cit., pp. 105-129

<sup>17</sup> See: Jerzy Grotowski (1968) *Towards a Poor Theatre*, London: Methuen

of women have worked with Gardzienice, he rarely credits the vital contribution they make to the company's practice.<sup>18</sup>

While Bral too can fall into the trap of generically using male-oriented terminology, he does openly and readily acknowledge the women involved in *Song of the Goat*. This, of course, is not to mention Zubrzycki's own profound influence and leadership on the group as a woman. Barba also demonstrates an increased consciousness towards gender issues in that he makes a pointed effort to use non-gender-specific terminology in his writing, as will be evidenced in Chapter Three. On the whole, however, detailed research into the gender roles of ensemble companies working in a laboratory theatre tradition emerging from Poland has not, to my knowledge, yet been conducted. This is an area of research that warrants dedicated study.

An additional issue to raise with regards to the terminology employed by this thesis is the usage of 'community'. It is not without a sense of trepidation that this term is employed. In contemporary society, 'community' has been adapted and manipulated to serve the purposes of 'inclusive' government policies, social projects, and corporate outreach programmes in an attempt to re-forge, reassert, and reconnect ties within an ever-expanding and disparate society. As Helen Nicholson points out:

A sentimental picture of local communities as comfortable social systems has re-entered the popular imagination and has been much used by politicians in their rhetoric, with positive connotations of interpersonal warmth, shared interests and local loyalty. (Nicholson, 2005: 83)

However, instead of being associated with a genuine desire for the care, commitment, and responsibility towards others, modern usage of 'community' has altered the term such that it has become a catch-all signifying an attempt at well-intentioned activity.

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<sup>18</sup> Elwira M. Grossman (2005a) 'Włodzimierz Staniewski with Alison Hodge. *Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice*', Review, *Modern Drama* 48:1, pp. 211-212

For the purposes of the present study, ‘community’ means the sincere belief and investment in other people; the desire to understand and be understood; to communicate and share experiences and knowledge freely; to be open to and respectful of the experiences and knowledge of others. My intention is to explore how the work of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat has contributed to a body of artistic practices that specifically aim to engender this sense of community. To do so, I have focused on a more sociological analysis of the ‘social group’, investigating – through the work of Sorokin, Elias, Bourdieu, and Bakhtin – the material that binds us together as human beings.

As part of this study’s theoretical framework, the first chapter draws on the work of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) in order to establish the necessity of social groups, bound in a relation of community, to the wider social world. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, he asserted that social groups provide people with a necessary sense of obligation, responsibility, and, most importantly for him, moral authority, which prevents the world from collapsing into a state of chaos, or ‘anomie’. According to Durkheim, social groups establish order and stability in the world by creating a wider organizing system through which people can understand and structure their lives.

During this same period, Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) placed similar importance on the role of the social group in society; however, his proposal is not framed according to authority and discipline as is Durkheim’s. Instead, he argues that society has lost a vital sense of compassion as a result of modernization and industrialization. Through his concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, or community and society, he asserts that the Industrial Revolution has generated a world built on convenience and self-interest, which has dissolved the binding sentiments of community such as responsibility for others and belonging to something greater than oneself. Tönnies’ ultimate point is that human beings,

bound together through a commonality and mutual investment contribute to the creation of a tolerant and peaceful society.

In conclusion, it is important to note that neither the Odin, Gardzienice, nor Song of the Goat claim to attempt to change society. All three directors are explicit in stating that they do not intend to alter any individual or community's beliefs or values, and equally assert that they do not wish to propose that any one tradition, opinion, or way of life is better than another.<sup>19</sup> Instead, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat attempt to provide opportunities for people to encounter one another, to celebrate their own unique identities and heritage, and to create a space in which groups that may hold differing world views can simply meet each other.

The ultimate aim of this study is therefore to open a broader discussion of the role these particular social performing groups play in the world. By drawing attention to their work as both artistic beings and as social individuals, interwoven with the histories, voices, experiences, activities, and influences of the larger world, this thesis will illuminate the work of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat, demonstrating the way theatre can be understood as an artistic exploration of humanity, providing a place for people to open themselves to each other, to question their own beliefs and values, to gain a deeper understanding of the world, and to engage in that world in a more tolerant and respectful manner.

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<sup>19</sup> See: Eugenio Barba (1986) *Beyond the Floating Islands*, trans. Richard Fowler, Judy Barba, Jerrold C. Rodesch, Saul Shapiro, New York: PAJ Publications, pp. 175; and Falina Filipowicz (1987) op. cit., pp. 162. Grzegorz Bral's opinions on this are as yet unrecorded, although they have been discussed in personal communication specifically in July 2011.

## **Chapter One: The Social Performing Group**

Odin Teatret, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat represent three generations of performance practice rooted in a particularly social understanding of theatre. Although their methods vary, these groups have formed tightly bound ensembles that aim to explore the full capacity of the performer as an integrated and involved member of the social world. This study therefore proposes that the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat can be examined as social performing groups, bound together through the artistic principles which have shaped their unique identities and practices.

The aim of this chapter is to establish a theoretical framework through which to understand both the social nature of these performing groups, and the larger social implications of their work. Against this backdrop, Chapter Two will detail the social, historical, and artistic context that has directly contributed to the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat's particularly social understanding of art, before turning to the groups' work in detail in Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

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Performing groups hold a unique position in the social world. As with any other social group, they are formed by individuals who share some level of commonality; from shared values, beliefs, and opinions to particular intentions and aims, the people who compose any socially formed group are bound together through a common understanding of, and engagement with, the world. For a performing group, however, this commonality extends directly into the craft of making performance. Individuals – actors, directors, designers, musicians, and dancers – come together through not only their shared desire but their common vision in creating performance. For the purposes of this study, performing groups are to be defined as closely bound ensembles working collaboratively to produce theatre.

An important distinction for performing groups is that they are formed with an intention to engage directly with an audience. For this reason, they can be understood as social groups with a particular social engagement. Unlike other art forms, theatre depends on some form of interaction that involves a reciprocal and constantly evolving dialogue between the actors and audience. Theatre artists therefore create conditions for social engagement; through text, music, movement, gesture, action, image, costume, lighting, and set, they aim to evoke emotional, intellectual, vocal, and even physical responses in an audience, which feed the continual development of a performance. For this reason, theatre can be understood as a “social activity through and through” (Shevtsova, 1993: ix).

For the three performing groups considered in this study, this level of social engagement has been enhanced. As collectives of theatre artists devoted to the life and art of their company, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat have each developed an idiosyncratic approach to performance that emphasizes the internal life of the group: through rigorous training, mutual subscription to the values and identity of the group, and an overwhelming sense of commitment, dedication, obligation, responsibility, and belonging.

These groups’ work builds on a tradition of laboratory theatre that has developed specifically in Poland. Through the work of Osterwa and Grotowski, laboratory theatre established a space in which a dedicated group of performers explore physical, vocal, emotional, and imaginative techniques in order to better develop their craft as performers. Laboratory theatre has evolved into a specific approach to performance, where actors have formed cohesive ensembles committed to the investigation, creation, and practice of theatre as an integrated component of their every day lives.

The work of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat have continued this tradition, drawing on an artistic legacy founded on the theatre practices of Juliusz Osterwa

and Jerzy Grotowski, both of whom pursued the creation of theatre as a means through which to investigate social relationships. The work of these two directors will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Two; however, it is important at present to introduce their work briefly in order to situate the performance practices of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat within a wider artistic context.

Osterwa's work with Reduta introduced the concept of laboratory theatre to Poland. The group was formed in Warsaw in the years following the First World War, with the intention of creating an artistic practice that could provide a model for a society. Founded on the principle that "moral, spiritual, social, and patriotic values should be at the core of theatrical creation" (Braun, 1996: 137), Reduta was formed as a community of artists bound together through a shared commitment to social responsibility. Their artistic work therefore evolved as a life practice, incorporating their training and performances, in addition to communal efforts to further support the life and activities of the group itself.

Grotowski began his own artistic exploration into the nature of human connection during his work with the Laboratory Theatre from 1959-1970. His work spanned forty years, involving diverse investigations into the physical, emotional, social, and psychic life of the performer. With the Laboratory Theatre, he established a rigorous physical training in which the actors sought to access deeply embedded experiences, memories, images, and responses in order to engage with their audiences through the expression of open, honest, and visceral human emotion. Following this period, he embarked on what he referred to as paratheatre, which abandoned theatrical form in an attempt to investigate human-to-human connection in its most organic state.

It is from this artistic tradition that the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat have emerged. The Odin was formed in 1964, immediately following Eugenio Barba's two-year apprenticeship with Grotowski at the Laboratory Theatre in Poland. During this time,



he observed an approach to theatrical training that involved a deep investigation into the physical, emotional, imaginative, and social capacities of the performer. In an attempt to pursue this line of training on his own, Barba established the Odin first in Norway before eventually settling in Denmark. However, his avant-garde techniques, which will be outlined in Chapter Three, were unfamiliar to the professional actors whom he approached and were generally regarded with suspicion. As a result, the Odin was formed of inexperienced actors and students committed to researching and making performance in their own unique way.

In almost fifty years of practice, the Odin has become a self-sufficient, self-reliant community, with many of the earliest actors still working with the company even today. Based in their own theatre facilities in the small rural town of Holstebro, the actors have structured their lives around the daily activities and tasks of the theatre, which includes training, rehearsals, costume and prop design, administrative tasks, research, publishing articles, organising visits and meetings with artists and scholars, and developing social projects with diverse communities around the world.

A strong sense of community is a defining characteristic of the Odin, which has influenced and intensified the relationships within the group in addition to shaping the way in which the group engages with the larger social world. Barba and the Odin's theatre practice contains the essence of who they are as a group. This can be seen in every element of their work. One example is their International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), which brings together artists, practitioners, scholars, and students from around the world. While a contentious issue – and one that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three – the aim of theatre anthropology is to identify powerful performance principles across a diverse range of techniques in order to train actors that can connect more strongly with an audience.

With regards to their social relationship to the outside world, however, Barba and the members of the Odin have developed a form of performance they refer to as ‘barters’, where the actors travel to remote and often marginalized communities around the world in order to trade in songs, dances, stories, or any other cultural, artistic, or social material that is a vital part of these communities’ identities. For the Odin, this means coming into contact with often extremely isolated cultures, where the actors – bound together through artistic and social principles – meet and attempt to engage with socially, ethnically, or culturally defined groups. Together with their work in ISTA, the group’s barters raise particular ethical concerns, all of which will be elaborated during the discussion of the Odin’s work in Chapter Three. However, as fundamental components of Barba and the Odin’s practice, these examples do indicate their artistic dedication to exploring the social relationships both within their own group and with diverse groups around the world.

Gardzienice is the second generation of groups to be discussed here. The group was founded by Włodzimierz Staniewski in 1977 after having worked as an actor with Grotowski for five years. The relationship between these two directors is complicated, and the analysis of Gardzienice’s work in Chapter Four will attempt to account for this in order to trace the line of influence from Grotowski to Staniewski’s work. In his early work with Gardzienice, Staniewski sought to establish a performance practice that developed immediately from the social, spiritual, and natural world. Believing that the essence of theatre lies in the spontaneous expression of emotions and in the cultural practices of communities that maintain a strong connection to their traditional ways of life, Staniewski and the actors of Gardzienice shaped their theatre on expeditions into isolated villages that were faced with cultural extinction. Focusing their travel within Poland during the earliest years, the group met with Ukrainians, Lemko, Polish, and Roma communities, instigating gatherings during which the actors and the local people had an opportunity to sing, dance,

and talk together, as the actors of Gardzienice sought not only to revive the social bonds within these groups, but to uncover fragments of their own cultural identities.

Gardzienice's artistic practice has developed within this rural and traditional context. Based on the grounds of a seventeenth-century manor house, the actors' lives and work have been shaped by their surroundings: training in open fields and forests, devising and performing amidst the ruins of once grand buildings, and interweaving their work with the songs, gestures, stories, and voices of the people they have encountered during their travels. While the group's work has changed considerably in recent years, a shift that will be addressed in Chapter Four, Staniewski and the actors of Gardzienice remain devoted to researching and creating theatre that maintains a strong connection with the traditions, rituals, and practices that, for them, lie at the heart of cultural identity.

The final group to be discussed in this study is Song of the Goat, formed by Grzegorz Bral and Anna Zubrzycki in 1996. Two former members of Gardzienice, the group's cofounders have continued to consciously explore social connections through their artistic practice. Their work has been enhanced, however, by their own practice of Tibetan Buddhism, which has infused their understanding of theatre with an attempt to create art through compassion. For the members of Song of the Goat, this principle is the foundation of their training. In this training, referred to as 'coordination', the actors learn to open themselves fully, accessing their own physical, vocal, mental, emotional, and imaginative sources in order to establish a strong connection with each other during their work. Their performances are a powerful example of ensemble theatre as they attempt to create visceral worlds in which actors and audience may together share a profound experience of human connection.

This intimate work requires a deep level of compassion and consideration for each other, principles that has influenced the relationships within the group itself and have

shaped the group's larger understanding of the world. A significant example of their strong social involvement is the annual Brave Festival: Against Cultural Exile, which focuses on artists and communities that practice culturally embedded and often marginalised artistic traditions. The intention is simply to give these diverse voices a platform upon which to celebrate their unique cultural heritage in an atmosphere of openness and respect. Through programmes such as this, Song of the Goat has extended the principles that uniquely define it into its artistic and social practice, creating a body of work that is fully integrated with its own ideals, attitudes, and perceptions as a socially engaged performing group.

As cohesive communities of artists, committed to the life and activities of their groups, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat can be understood as social groups, bound together through their members' mutual investment in the principles and practices that define them each as unique. As will become evident through the course of this chapter, social groups necessarily engage in the world through the characteristics that define them. However, as communities in their own right, the performing groups at the heart of this thesis are both socially formed and consciously formed with an intention to engage with an audience. Beyond this, however, these three groups can be understood as particularly social because they are devoted specifically to investigating the social connections inherent in performance.

The Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat are therefore three groups whose specific approaches to performance demonstrate theatre's artistic and social capacity. To understand the particularly social nature of these performing groups, and to illuminate their specific role in generating social interaction between people through theatre, the present chapter will examine, first, the nature of social groups and, second, discuss the way in which social beings interact with one another. This framework will allow for a deeper understanding of the artistic and social function of these three performing groups.

## **Defining the Social Group**

Fundamentally, we live in a social world composed of an intricate web of social relationships. As Norbert Elias (1897-1990) argues, every individual is socially defined – either in collaboration or in opposition – through these relationships (Elias, 1991: 16). We are friends and colleagues, mothers and children, artists, loners, teachers, students; the list goes on and on, and changes, often dramatically, throughout our lives. In this way, Elias suggests that every person's identity is shaped by and through their social relationships:

[E]ach individual person...is tied by living in permanent functional dependence on other people; he is a link in the chains binding other people, just as all others, directly or indirectly, are links in the chains which bind him. These chains are...elastic, more variable, more changeable; but they are no less real, and certainly no less strong. And it is this network of the functions which people have for each other...[that] we call 'social structures'. (ibid.: 16)

The implication of Elias's argument is that relationships are an integral part of how we see the world and, equally, how the world defines us. Individuals are woven into the world's social fabric. As a result, social relationships can be understood as part of the very structure and composition of the human world.

For Elias, individuals are in a constant process of accumulating and transmitting social material. He suggests that this begins at birth and continues throughout an entire lifetime, during which each person "takes on his individual stamp from the history of these relationships, these dependencies, and so, in a broader context, from the history of the whole human network within which he grows up and lives" (ibid.: 27). The individual, in this view, can be understood as a unique aggregate of influences and social relationships, affected and influenced by and through others' opinions and values, history, ideals, choices, and opportunities.

It is important to note here that Elias's work does not specifically attempt to dissolve the importance of the individual as a person in him- or herself. Because his primary interest is in the dynamic forces binding human beings together into groups – this is, for him, society – Elias proposes a reversal in understanding the role between individual and society. Whereas the positivist view, as proposed by Auguste Comte (1798-1857), argues that the individual directly shapes and creates his or her world, Elias retorts by arguing that the individual is in fact inseparable from society; society cannot be removed from the individual.

Referring to this ongoing sociological debate as a 'party game', Elias comments that it "can only carry on *ad infinitum* because it separates like two *substances* what are in fact two inseparable *functions* of human beings as they live together" (Elias, 1991: 55). In this way, he contends that it is the social ties bound in a vast network of relationships that activate and inform the individual. Elias asserts:

[T]he individual person is only able to say 'I' if and because he can at the same time say 'we'. Even the thought 'I am', and still more the thought 'I think', presupposes the existence of other people and a communal life with them - in short, a group, a society. (ibid.: 61)

Using a metaphor of a symphony to further elaborate this process, Elias points out that, just as the individual notes mean one thing on their own, so too does the score of the music directing the notes. The symphony, however, is composed of relations between the notes; the score itself becomes music when individuals play notes on individual violins, cellos, oboes, and flutes becoming an interplay of woven, related, and *relating* sounds (ibid.: 18-19). To use another metaphor, each individual outside of a group to which he or she belongs is a piece of a larger puzzle, and it is the relationships of interlocking joints that create the entire image.

As a result, social relationships can be understood as the very structure and composition of the human world. Illustrating this point through the example of a stone house, Elias states that this house is not its individual stones, nor is it the structure that those stones create, but instead it exists as “the relations *between* the individual stones...the complex of functions the stones have in relation to each other” (Elias, 1991: 19). For Elias, relationships compose the network that is society.

Society in this light is composed not only of a mass of individuals, but of individuals in relationship – a phenomenon which extends naturally to socially-formed groups. As mentioned previously, social groups on a most basic level can be seen as collections of individuals united by affinity or common cause. And like any other social group, the performing group is composed of social individuals who are invested in and defined by the group as a whole. Forming groups is a natural process; any given individual belongs to a variety of social groups throughout his or her life, be they cultural, political, economic, or religious, which together contribute to an individual’s social identity by defining him or her in relation to the rest of society.

These groups draw generally upon commonalities: those sharing common traits, interests, or beliefs identify easily with one another. For a start, then, a social group can be understood as “two or more people possessing a common social identification and whose existence as a group is recognized by a third party” (Brown, 1988: 17). In this sense, social groups form based on recognisable and acknowledged commonalities between individuals, from ethnicity, religion, nationality, class, and gender to occupation, hobbies, age, and so on, that establish an immediate bond of both affinity and familiarity between them, and define them in distinction to others.

This definition, however, provides only a surface understanding of the social group and of its potential significance in the larger social world. By categorising social groups as

simply a collection of individuals with a shared commonality, all manner of ambiguous and loosely-defined collections of people may too easily be classified as social groups. In fact, understanding the bond between people through mere “physical adjacency or common interest” (Olmsted and Hare, 1978: 11) forces us to consider every arbitrary collection of people as a group, from a crowd waiting for the same train to individuals working at the local library. This in no way helps to develop a deeper understanding of the social relationships between people. As Pitirim A. Sorokin states bluntly:

[T]he classification...of millions of various social groups that exist in the sociocultural universe, ...[including] the ‘club of lovers of photography’ and ‘association of the collectors of broken whisky bottles’... is useless and gets us nowhere. (Sorokin, 1962: 168)

Instead, he proposes that social groups must maintain a level of investment and commitment between their individual members, necessitating the creation of a more meaningful social relationship (ibid.). This is an important distinction: whereas a group defined merely through affinity collects its members through categorical and, often, superficial links, an added sense of responsibility and care towards others intensifies and strengthens the bond. Psychologist Kurt Lewin goes further to suggest that “it is not similarity or dissimilarity of individuals that constitutes a group, but the interdependence of fate” (Lewin, 1948: 165). The connective powers binding individuals together are therefore quite different than a simple shared taste or opinion; instead, it is defining oneself through that commonality by believing in the commonality and investing oneself in that connection.

This is a fundamental concept not only in understanding the nature of the social group but in beginning to approach the work of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat. A deeper level of commitment and investment is a key feature for understanding these social performing groups. As will become evident in the individual case studies, artistic practice has become a way of life for the actors of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song



of the Goat, with each group constructing a rigorous training and devising processes that encompass the members' daily lives. Training has evolved not only for the body and voice, but with an aim to access to deeper emotions, experiences, memories, images, and associations in an attempt to encounter audiences through the actors' own encounter with themselves. By delving into their own profound experiences in the process of creating performance, the level of commitment, dedication, and trust between the members of each group has become of primary importance.

This being said, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat, in their own distinct ways, have developed as unique groups shaped not only by their individual members, but the details surrounding the groups' formation, the sociopolitical environment in which they were formed, the influences leading to their formation, and the constant evolution of their working practices. This is the case for any social group: the context of its development informs its evolution.

To underline this process, it is essential to refer to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose theories provide a deeper examination of the nature of identity for both an individual and a group. His examination is based on his concept of 'habitus', where he argues that every individual and every group can be understood as a composite of accumulated experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and acquired knowledge that develops through the interwoven network of social relationships that exist in society, influencing their place and position in the wider social world.<sup>20</sup> He explains that

the structures characteristic of a determinate type of conditions of existence, through the economic and social necessity which they bring to bear on the relatively autonomous universe of family relationships...produce the structures of the habitus which become in turn the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience. (Bourdieu, 1977: 78)

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<sup>20</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, in which he analyzes the evolution of acquired knowledge and experience influencing developed tastes, opinions and judgments through extensive data. For future reference, Bourdieu uses the term 'habitus' as both singular and plural.

The influence of these social relationships can be profound: a baby is first taught by its family both explicitly and by example. It is introduced to speech, movement, gestures, food, and so on. Later in life, that child is educated by schools, social clubs, friends, teachers, and institutions, learning facts, customs, and etiquette which are dictated by a range of cultural, economic, political, and religious influences, as well as absorbing implicit actions from those around them. Eventually, the child enters adulthood with a personalised set of tastes and preferences (food, music, art, literature), modes of behaviour (gestures, body language, posture) and a particular understanding of the world (values, politics, standards), which have evolved from the network of social relationships to which he or she has been exposed.

Bourdieu, however, does not limit his concept of habitus to a mere record of each individual's past. Instead, he proposes that it is a reciprocal system that not only defines the individual, but determines and ensures the way in which he or she continues to develop. Habitus therefore consists of accumulated experiences, knowledge, and perceptions, while at the same time directing decisions and actions based on that individual's identity. As Bourdieu explains: "The *habitus* – embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). Hardly a static collection of past experiences, habitus instead operates as a dynamic driving force behind the continual renewal and regeneration of an individual's very identity.

For Bourdieu, this integrated concept of identity also extends to social groups. When individuals find commonality between them and take the next step to invest in each other, they form a group that develops its own unique identity. Composed of the initial conditions that brought the members together in the first place, group identity also encompasses a range of developing experiences and understandings that evolve within the

group over time. Bourdieu proposes that this includes “common schemes of perception, conception and action...and the objective co-ordination of practices and the sharing of a world-view” (Bourdieu, 1990: 60).

This being said, he is quick to point out that this does not create a homogenous, single-minded group identity (unless dealing with social groups such as cults, in which case individual identity is seen as a threat to the group). Instead, a healthy social group is essentially bound through its variation and through each member’s unique relationship to the others. Bourdieu writes:

members of the same class are united in a relationship of homology, that is, of diversity within homogeneity reflecting the diversity within homogeneity characteristic of their social conditions of production. Each individual system of dispositions is a structural variant of the others, expressing the singularity of its position within the class and its trajectory. (ibid.)<sup>21</sup>

What he suggests here is that every individual in a social group subscribes to the particular meaning of the group, or a uniting factor that brings the individual members together in forming the group.

Yet within that structure, each individual maintains his or her own habitus, which operates in tandem with the habitus of the other members, and constantly reassesses itself in relation to those habitus. Group habitus functions as a great social balancing act: while each member’s distinct habitus influences – and is influenced by – the particular social relationships present in the group, these individual members, bound to the other members through some sort of commonality, simultaneously uphold and propagate the particular group habitus as they operate in the social world as members of that group.

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<sup>21</sup> In this citation, Bourdieu refers to group habitus in terms of a class habitus, as class structure and fraction is, in his own analysis, one of the defining characteristics of the habitus, as mentioned previously. However, he often makes the comparison between class and group habitus (Bourdieu, 1990: 60) and, for the reasons explained in the Introduction, the present study employs this term less in terms of class structures and divisions, and more in the wider context of how the three performing groups at the centre of this study have formed as social groups, and how their values and perceptions shape their artistic practice and social engagement with the world.

This argument acknowledges the diversity of identities within a group, while still defining the habitus as a binding structure that defines the identity of that group as a whole. To further develop our understanding, it is helpful to return to the work of Sorokin. He proposes that social groups are driven by their own identity; their lives are shaped directly by the group definition that has been adopted by all of its members:

From the moment of its emergence, in accordance with its sociocultural nature, the group determines its main functions, whether they be political, scientific, economic, religious, criminal. From the moment of its emergence it is largely a self-changing and self-directing unity that bears in itself the essentials of its life-career, the direction of its change, its phases, and its destination. As such it has always a margin of autonomy from the external forces. In widely different milieu, conditions, and situations it keeps its own identity and integrity. In all these respects it is an immanent self-regulating and self-determining system. (Sorokin, 1962: 155)

Social groups are fluid entities, influenced by and mutually dependent upon the structure to which the individuals subscribe, in addition to their network of relationships within the group.

For the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat, habitus has evolved as both an artistic and social principle. Each group has been formed by a social individual – a director – with a desire to create theatre in a particular manner. Barba wanted to explore the full capacity of the performer as a physical, social, and imaginative being, against any odds. Staniewski sought to build a theatre practice that returned to the lives and traditions of cultures that were being lost. Bral and Zubrzycki built on their own body of experiences to form a group rooted in the organic exploration of what it means to be a human being, connected to the larger social world. In essence, these directors' own individual habitus – how they are defined and place themselves as social beings – has determined the nature of their understanding of theatre.

The group habitus for each of these performing groups has developed accordingly. Because the individual members have subscribed to the ideals of the group itself, they have

formed a social group that both adheres to and is actively shaped *by* those principles. For the Odin, habitus is fundamentally defined by its defiant individualism. The group prides itself on its self-sufficiency, and its ability to provide and create the necessary resources for its own survival. Gardzienice's habitus has been shaped by its relationship to the land and its people. The life of the group is bound to the tasks, activities, and rhythm of their surrounding natural environment, which has shaped a performing group that exists as a community in its own right. For Song of the Goat, the group's habitus is grounded in a desire to live compassionately and in harmony with the larger world. The members of all three of these performing groups have formed cohesive ensembles with a unique group habitus that enshrines the fundamental principles of each group. Through their individual and collective artistic practice, the members of these groups continually reinforce the characteristics that define them.

Returning again to Bourdieu, this constant, dynamic state of the social group holds particular importance. His concept of habitus is not limited to the internal life of the group. In fact, he proposes that habitus directly determines the way in which a group places itself and functions in the social world. This understanding developed from Bourdieu's own fieldwork in Algeria, where he studied the marriage rituals of the Kabyle. During his research, he noted that many of the rituals he witnessed seemed outside his spectrum of understanding. However, when he began to place them within the context of the community's habitus, their rites and ceremonies, patterns of behaviour, preferences, and decisions became significantly more meaningful to him. In this way, Bourdieu explains that he began to understand these rites as

no longer as the product of obedience to a norm or conformity to an unconscious model but as a reproduction strategy, taking on its meaning in a system of strategies

generated by the *habitus* and oriented towards realization of the same social function. (Bourdieu, 1990: 16)<sup>22</sup>

Habitus contributes directly to a group's social activities, just as that group's habitus is, in turn, shaped *by* those activities. A social group is a mutually invested collection of individuals who operate in a perpetually shifting social environment. The members of the group's actions are determined and shaped by their sense of identity, which in turn is shaped by their membership in the group.

This theory builds a foundation upon which we can understand the development of a group's engagement with the world. The everyday life of the Kabyle, for instance, reflects what it means to *be* Kabyle. From their marriage rituals to the everyday routines of the group, their gestures, traditions, expressions, and mannerisms all indicate and demonstrate the life of the group. Habitus can therefore be understood as an indicator the group's social existence, defining the group, determining its function as a group, and reinforcing its own self-definition through the way in which it operates in society. Bourdieu states:

In so far – and only in so far – as *habitus* are the incorporation of the same history, or more concretely, of the same history objectified in *habitus* and structures, the practices they generate are mutually intelligible and immediately adjusted to the structures, and also objectively concerted and endowed with an objective meaning that is at once unitary and systematic, transcending subjective intentions and conscious projects, whether individual or collective. (Bourdieu, 1990: 58)

A group acts in accordance with the shared perceptions, beliefs, and values of the individuals, and transmits these defining characteristics through its practice as it interacts with other groups in the social world. As a result, habitus functions as both the “internalization of externality” (ibid.: 55), and equally as the *externalization of internality*, where a group's own defining characteristics and systems of behaviour are manifested in active practice.

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on Bourdieu's work in Algeria, see: Pierre Bourdieu (1962) *The Algerians*, trans. Alan C. M. Ross, Boston: Beacon Press

To expand this theory further, it is useful to turn to the work of Lucien Goldmann. In an examination of the tragedies of Racine and Pascal and their involvement with the Jansenists, a branch of Roman Catholicism that emerged in seventeenth-century France, Goldmann proposes that every social group shapes its work in accordance with their *vision du monde*, or world view, which he defines as “an organic unity which links together both values and actions” (Goldmann, 1964: 90).<sup>23</sup> In Goldmann’s understanding, social and cultural material – in his case, Pascal’s *Pensees* and Racine’s tragic plays – is shaped by that individual’s social, cultural, and political environment.

A social group, bound together through a common world view, can influence an individual profoundly, which ensures the creation of work based on shared

feelings, aspirations and ideas of the members of a particular social class; ... which is developed as a result of a particular social and economic situation, and which then gives rise to a set of activities performed by the real or potential community constituted by this social class. (ibid.: 18)

A social group operates and creates as only that social group can. With its activities bound intractably to that which defines the group as a whole, the social group’s internal and external functions are tied to the way in which it places itself in the world. In other words, every action performed by the group develops directly from the group’s unique identity. This, in turn, shapes the group’s defining characteristics: its values, perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and so on. To refer again to Bourdieu’s terminology, it is possible to understand that a group’s habitus shapes its world view, which then determines that group’s placement in the social world, ensures its idiosyncratic function in the world, and determines the nature of its practice.

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<sup>23</sup> Philip Thody translates Goldmann’s concept of *vision du monde* as world vision. This term is more commonly recognised in English as ‘world view’, which indicates a more penetrating understanding of the world, as opposed to a mere image. Although the translated ‘world vision’ will be maintained in citations, this study will otherwise adhere to the more accessible term, ‘world view’. See: Lucien Goldman (1964) *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensees of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, trans. Philip Thody, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

In the case of social performing groups, this argument suggests that each group's artistic practice is an integral and representative component of the group's habitus, and demonstrative of that group's world view. The way in which the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat create theatre therefore incorporates each group's conscious and *unconscious* choices, the members' intentions, motivations, ambitions, and perceptions of the world. From each group's unique approach to training and devising – let alone the fact that the members' train and devise at all, which itself is an indicator of the specific nature of these performing groups – to the particular styles and compositions of the performances they create, the work of these groups is directly shaped by the criteria that define them as groups in the first place. This theoretical understanding of the nature of social groups provides us with a framework through which we can view the artistic and social practices of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat. For the present, however, it is simply important to note that social performing groups are shaped by a multitude of influences, which fundamentally determine the way in which each group understands itself in relation to the larger social world.

### **Interaction and the Social Sign**

To exist in the social world necessitates – and implies – interaction: throughout our lives, it is undeniable that we, both as individuals and as members of social groups, come into contact with others. Some interactions are more superficial than others: a brief encounter on the street or a friendly chat with a shop clerk only conveys so much information between the two parties. Other interactions, however, may be profound. Barba's early conversations with Grotowski lasted into the early hours of the morning as the two men shared ideas and ambitions, and discussed politics, religion, history, music, and art (Barba, 1999: 46-47). These can be seen as meaningful interactions, in which both participants strive to



communicate with one another in an attempt to reach some common level of understanding between them. In any interaction, we may find that we share a common background or education with those we encounter; alternately, we may discover differing or opposing opinions, beliefs, or values. However, if we are to engage meaningfully with each other, we must each find a way to express ourselves such that we can move beyond our differences and *hear* each other.

Because social groups operate in the social world, they naturally come into contact with others. When this happens, the group engages in an interaction or, as Erving Goffman (1922-1982) describes, a “reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s action when in one another’s immediate physical presence” (Goffman, 1990: 26). During this process, each group inevitably presents its own identity. Its habitus and world view are conveyed through speech, phrasing, tones, rhythms of words, gestures, eye contact, inferences, hesitations, familiarity, or formality, and many other indicators that contain vital aspects of that group’s identity.

Indicators such as these are what Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) refers to as signs. As a linguist working in the late nineteenth century, it is important to note that his work is concerned only with the foundations of spoken language; for him, it is only verbal signs, or words, which indicate and convey meaning during communication. Saussure classified signs in two ways: as words, which he refers to as ‘sound patterns’, and as concepts. The relationship between words and concepts are arbitrarily assigned and automatically transmitted; the concept of tree, for instance, has been assigned the word, ‘tree’, which, for English-speakers, has been accepted over time, through history and tradition, to become a concrete, mutually agreed upon sign.

Following Saussure’s definition, signs can be understood as the fundamental building blocks for communication between people who share a common understanding of

what a particular word signifies. Signs create a closed language structure to which linguistic groups strictly adhere. Saussure argues that “linguistically linked [individuals]...will establish among themselves a kind of mean; all of them will reproduce – doubtless not exactly, but approximately – the same signs linked to the same concepts” (Saussure, 1986: 13). In this way, his proposal suggests that the accepted signs within a language structure are unchangeable, even going so far as to state that individuals can by no means introduce new verbal signs (ibid.: 71) since he or she is committed invariably to the already existing signs in order to be able to function properly and effectively in his or her own community.

This argument sees language as a binding system for those social groups that are defined through language, providing strict criteria that ensure the existence and life of the group as a whole. Saussure specifies that

[i]f we could collect the totality of word patterns stored in all those individuals, we should have the social bond which constitutes their language. It is a fund accumulated by the members of the community through the practice of speech, a grammatical system existing potentially in every brain, or more exactly in the brains of a group of individuals; for language is never complete in any single individual, but exists perfectly only in the collectivity. (ibid.: 13)

Language represents a social group; as “part and parcel of the life of the whole community” (ibid.: 74), language, as understood by Saussure, provides a detailed and continually-supported structure to which language-sharing individuals subscribe.

Saussure’s view of signs as solely verbal is highly restrictive. For our purposes, it is important to remember that communication is hardly limited to words. As Goffman’s definition of interaction implies, signs can include any signal that passes information from one person to another, be it physical or verbal, blatant or inferred. Posture, gaze, facial expressions, gestures, intonation, syntax, and tone are only a few of the ways in which humans communicate with each other. Goffman makes this point when he outlines the vast criteria that contribute to every social interaction, including characteristics that define the

‘setting’ in which the communication occurs, the ‘appearance’ of the participants, and the ‘manner’ in which they present themselves to each other (Goffman, 1990: 32-34). People therefore convey an endless variety of signs, from information expressed consciously – through gestures, words, and inflection – to all variety of unconscious hints and inferences that may be transmitted through glances, ticks, hesitations, that may suggest something quite different.

In light of this, we can expand upon Saussure’s proposal in order to better understand the way in which any social group will interact with another. Upholding their own unique sign system of words, symbols, terminology, inside jokes, shared gestures, and so on, a group’s sign system is not simply offered into the world during an interaction; signs are received by people, and how any individual or group interprets them will have a further effect on the way in which that particular interaction develops. Communication therefore depends not only on a concrete, established sign system, as Saussure proposes, but on the constant and reciprocal *exchange* of signs between socially defined groups.

Saussure’s theory, however, is unable to take this fluidity of signs into account. Because he presents language as an already established, externalised system, the only social involvement in Saussure’s analysis is that humans subscribe and bind themselves to a system of signs. The implication of this is that language is static; a fixed communicative structure existing within the confines of a group. Saussure argues that language is a “product passively registered by the individual. It never requires premeditation, and reflexion enters into it only for the activity of classifying” (Saussure, 1986: 14).

Because of this structuralist understanding of semiotics, Saussure’s proposals are of limited use in a deeper examination of the way in which people communicate and understand each other. As Goffman established, interaction requires reciprocal influence.

If we limit ourselves to Saussure's definition, we would neglect the innate flexibility necessitated by social interaction and communication with its give and take ceases to exist.

In fact, signs are a social phenomenon and transfer meaning from one individual or group to another during an interaction. In order for this interaction to become meaningful, however, the parties must establish some level of understanding between them. Arguing against Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin asserts that language is constructed "not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view...insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life (Bakhtin, 1981: 271). According to Bakhtin, signs carry the weight of a group's identity. Their structure, form, and nature are fundamental indicators of the group's own habitus.

An important component of Bakhtin's proposal is that signs themselves are created as they are given meaning by social beings. His suggestion is that the creation of signs occurs through – and only through – social interaction, as social individuals and groups imbue the signs they use with meaning simply by using them as a means of communication. In this way, signs "can no longer be conceived as pre-given and 'natural', for, in being social, their sense, meaning, and communicability all depend on how they are made, where, and to whom for which precise purposes" (Shevtsova, 1989c: 289). Signs are therefore in a constant process of creation and recreation. As groups present and respond to other signs throughout the course of an interaction, they shape and reshape the way in which they perceive, describe, and understand the world around them.

In this perpetual process of sign creation, Bakhtin suggests that signs are in fact a vital component in the construction of human thought. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik observe of Bakhtin's work that "human consciousness originates solely in verbal communication which, by its nature, is anchored in social interaction" (Vološinov, 1973:

viii). Put differently, consciousness itself develops through the social act of communication. It is important to note that Bakhtin, similarly to Saussure, proposes that this process occurs between those organized socially. Individuals with some level of commonality share a way of communicating. As Bakhtin indicates:

Every sign...is a construct between socially organized persons in the process of their interaction. Therefore, *the forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction.* (Vološinov, 1973: 21)

Signs are created through the interaction that occurs between members of a group, establishing a means of communication that embodies the very nature of the group itself. Every group therefore maintains its own unique sign system, which signifies the characteristics that define that group as a group; signs “make contact with the bases of the group’s material life” (ibid.: 22).

As social beings in a social world, it is inevitable that groups encounter other groups with diverse sign systems. This causes a confrontation between different ways of thinking, behaving, and understanding the world. Within a meaningful interaction where the groups involved establish some basis for understanding one another, their sign systems cannot remain resolutely fixed. There must be flexibility and adaptation in order to find a level of common ground.

During such an interaction, each group begins to communicate through signs from its own system. Their signs are expressed to the other group, which are received and compared with their own signs. Any unrecognised or unfamiliar signs are evaluated and matched with pre-existing signs in order that the group may identify them and respond accordingly. This process accounts for situations such as encounters between two people who do not speak the same language. Gestures, facial expressions, intonation, emphasis, and body language all contribute to the meaning an individual may attempt to convey. Each

of these signs are received, interpreted, and hopefully, understood. As Bakhtin comments, the “understanding of a sign is, after all, an act of reference between the sign apprehended and other, already known signs; in other words, understanding is a response to a sign with signs” (Vološinov, 1973: 11).

For Bakhtin, then, communication is a process of understanding, where signs are not static, but fluid and adaptable as they are influenced, informed, and affected by other signs throughout the course of an interaction. As a result, he believes communication to be “entangled, shot through with shared thoughts...[where a sign] weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group” (Bakhtin, 1981: 276). If two groups are open to each other, they will respond to new signs as they constantly evaluate, adapt, and transform their own sign systems. To refer again to Bakhtin: “Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other” (ibid.: 282).

For this reason, the act of understanding does not occur in isolation. Instead, it develops through the constant exchange and accumulation of signs that are both conveyed and received throughout the course of an interaction. This suggests that interaction between two groups, who desire to communicate with and understand one another, has the potential to heighten each group’s ability not only to acknowledge foreign sign systems, but to develop a level of openness towards those practices, ideas, habits, beliefs, and world views that may be otherwise unfamiliar.

It is equally important to note that this process has an added potential within the group’s own structure. An encounter with another sign system also helps to solidify both groups’ own individual systems by allowing them to become conscious of their own world views. In this way, interactions draw attention to the defining characteristics of our unique

habitus, and underline the characteristics that define others, enhancing our ability to be more accepting of ways of life different from our own.

### **The Social Performing Group**

Understanding communication as a mutually informing process has profound implications for the theatre. To begin with, theatre is particularly social art form. In its earliest stages, theatre is constructed by social individuals who interact with one another in order to create an artistic product. This product is composed of social material drawn from the lives of those who have created it, and charged with their relationships and attitudes, artistic visions, styles, and influences. Every decision becomes a sign: a chosen text, image, theme, or piece of music, the construction and design of set, lighting, costumes, and props, the composition of scenes, movement, gestures, action, textual interpretation, and so on, all contain vital social material that emerges from the life of the actors and their work together. These signs also convey that material, as theatre is in its very nature an artistically driven social encounter between the actors and the audience. Performance can therefore be understood as an artistic process consisting of and embedded in social material. As Shevtsova elaborates, it is a “dynamic process of creation generated by [its] creators” (Shevtsova, 1993: 7).

Within the framework of this discussion, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat occupy a unique position because their artistic exploration of social relationships is a conscious component of their work. In each case, the members of these companies have established performing groups as inclusive and invested social groups, bound through their commitment to each other. They create theatre as a means through which to open themselves to a more profound search for connections between people.

For all three groups, this search has manifested itself in every aspect of their practice: each group's habitus determines its practice just as its world view shape the way in which the group understands and engages with the world. With Barba and the Odin, their driving desire to find acceptance for their own unique approach to theatre has shaped a practice that aims to build a wider, inclusive community for all marginalized communities, be they artistically, socially, ethnically, or culturally formed. This phenomenon can be seen in Barba's concept of theatre anthropology and in the group's practice of barter, both introduced in brief at the beginning of this chapter. On the whole, their theatre practice has followed their own life as a group, leading them to explore performance as a means through which to create community between people of diverse backgrounds.

Gardzienice's work, as indicated earlier, has grown from the land and culture of eastern Poland. Because Staniewski believes that the heart of theatre is in the interactions, the cultural practices, and the spontaneous expressions of everyday life, the actors of Gardzienice have shaped a performance practice that draws directly on this material. This can be seen most directly through the group's expeditions and gatherings, to be discussed in Chapter Four, as the actors devoted their earliest years to travelling so that they could meet with communities that kept alive their own cultural heritage. Gardzienice's own identity as a group has been shaped fundamentally by these experiences, themselves working from an isolated village and committed to creating theatre that emerges directly from the diverse voices, landscapes, and histories in Poland.

Finally, the performance practice of Song of the Goat is fundamentally concerned with creating open exchanges between people. Drawing on the principle of compassion from Bral and Zubrzycki's practice of Buddhism, the group builds performances, organises meetings, initiates projects, and contributes to local and diverse communities with the intention of providing a space in which people may encounter each other honestly and



openly. From the actors' intense training in coordination to the Brave Festival, both of which will be addressed thoroughly in Chapter Five, Song of the Goat's practice has developed to directly embody the principles of respect, openness, and compassion that shape the group as a whole.

All three of these groups demonstrate that, because of the intense bonds that hold the members together, their artistic practices are shaped by the actors' commitments to the group, and by the way in which they direct their engagement with the larger world. In fact, the unique *habitus* of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat have themselves indicated the groups' dedication *to* the larger social world. Because each of these groups has been consciously formed as a socially committed artistic group, it is only natural that their work will evolve accordingly. These three groups therefore embody their desire to build connections between people and have a practice that attempts to do so.

A fundamental component of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat's theatre practices is their shared desire to reach out to marginalized communities. While their approaches and motivations vary, each of these groups makes a point to engage with diverse ethnic, cultural, social, or religious minorities. The Odin does so to connect with alienated, isolated, and excluded communities in an attempt to provide a greater sense of inclusion. Gardzienice searches for the last remaining vestiges of traditional culture – elements that, for them, hold the key to cultural identity, belonging, and to theatre itself. Song of the Goat wishes to offer those with whom they engage a more profound experience of harmony. In each case, these three performing groups attempt to build community.

According to Emile Durkheim, unity can only occur through the bonds within a social group. Analysing the effects of industrialization during the nineteenth century, he proposes that, without the structure and discipline of social groups, society collapses into

anomie as it loses any sense of the social norms and values that regulate social life. He explains:

It is this anomic state that is the cause...of the incessantly recurrent conflicts, and the multifarious disorders of which the economic world exhibits so sad a spectacle. For, as nothing restrains the active forces and assigns [people] limits they are bound to respect, they tend to develop haphazardly, and come into collision with one another, battling and weakening themselves. ...Human passions stop only before a moral power they respect. If all authority of this kind is wanting, the law of the strongest prevails, and latent or active, the state of war is necessarily chronic. (Durkheim, 1964: 2-3)

Social groups provide a firm base upon which people may exist and operate in the world. Establishing a framework through which to view the world, they shape the way in which each individual understands his or her place in society and functions in society, therefore maintaining, as Durkheim believes, a healthy society.

Ferdinand Tönnies, also writing at the end of the nineteenth century, believed that the industrial era had forced society to abandon the strong social bonds that provide a wider sense of communal engagement, creating a society shaped largely by opportunism and the pursuit of personal gain. He defines this as ‘Gesellschaft’, alternately translated as ‘society’ or ‘association’, which he describes as an environment in which

nobody wants to grant and produce anything for another individual, nor will he be inclined to give ungrudgingly to another individual, if it be not in exchange for a gift or labor equivalent that he considers at least equal to what he has given. (Tönnies, 1955: 75)

Tönnies noted that, as people moved away from the villages and town into the cities, familial bonds collapsed, taking with them the care, support, security, and necessary structure they provide.

Importantly, he contrasts this with a more traditional society, his ‘Gemeinschaft’ or community. For him, a healthy society is built fundamentally on an open exchange between people. As he explains:

Social relationship or bond implies interdependence, and it means that the will of the one person influences that of the other, either furthering or impeding, or both. If

the volition of the one meets and combines with the volition of the other, there results a common volition which may be interpreted as unified because it is mutual. (Tönnies, 1955: 9)

Similarly to Durkheim's proposal, Tönnies suggests that individuals, engaged with one another through a common 'volition' are united through their mutual investment.

This interdependence between people is vital in creating a healthy society built on obligation, responsibility, and as cited earlier, what Lewin defined specifically as an "interdependence of fate" (Lewin, 1948: 165).

Without the support of this structure of interdependence, however, individuals cease to consider others, resulting in a cold, impersonal society. For Tönnies, this has extraordinarily dangerous consequences. Because his argument resonates strongly with the present study, it will be quoted at length:

The substance of the common spirit has become so weak or the link connecting him with the others worn so thin that it has to be excluded from consideration. In contrast to the family and co-operative relationship, this is true of all relations among separate individuals where there is no common understanding and no time-honored custom or belief creates a common bond. This means war and the unrestricted freedom of all to destroy and subjugate one another, or, being aware of possible greater advantage, to conclude agreements and foster new ties. ...In this connection we see a community organization and social conditions in which the individuals remain in isolation and veiled hostility toward each other so that only fear of clever retaliation restrains them from attacking one another, and, therefore, even peaceful and neighborly relations are in reality based upon a warlike situation. This is, according to our concepts, the condition of *Gesellschaft*-like civilization, in which peace and commerce are maintained through conventions and...underlying mutual fear. (Tönnies, 1955: 262-263)

Groups of individuals, bound together through their commitment to one another, provide an essential foundation upon which society as a whole may continue to develop. If lacking these social ties, people may lose their human capacity for compassion and empathy, which, as Tönnies indicates, can too rapidly dissolve into violence, aggression, hatred, and fear.

For the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat, theatre has become a means through which they engage with the world. Each of these groups has an artistic and a social

function, training actors, devising performances, engaging with audiences, and reaching out to communities around the world in an attempt to explore and strengthen the characteristics that define cultural identity and equally provide a greater sense of belonging, investment, and responsibility that is necessitated by committed social relationships. These groups build opportunities through their practices of theatre to enhance the level of understanding and acceptance between unique and sometimes opposing world views.

It is important to note, however, that the work of these three performing groups is not overtly political. While for each group, a firm political stance against isolationism, ignorance, and personal gain underlines their practices, these groups fundamentally seek a revitalisation of human-to-human connection. By building on a tradition of socially engaged artistic practices – the subject of the next chapter – these groups fight for a way to protect not only people’s heritage, but the very substance that shapes people into a community bound through mutual respect, care, and responsibility.

These performing groups therefore seek to create theatre as a dialogue, creating a shared experience between people with differing world views and sign systems in an attempt to provide communities with a renewed sense of responsibility toward, and investment in, others. For this reason, the theatre practices of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat are a fundamental demonstration of how performance may revive a sense of belonging, acceptance, belief, and trust in other human beings.

## **Chapter Two: Nationalism, Romanticism, and the Development of Socially Engaged Theatre in Poland**

The work of the *Odin*, *Gardzienice*, and *Song of the Goat* has emerged from a long Polish tradition anchored in the practice of art as an active, social process. Linked inextricably to the development of both nationalism and Romanticism in Poland at the beginning of the nineteenth century, this particularly social approach to art was directly triggered by severe economic, political, and cultural suppression resulting from the devastating partitions of Polish territory by the Prussian, Russian, and Austrian Empires at the end of the eighteenth century.

As Polish borders dissolved, an ethnically diverse population struggled to maintain their own beliefs, traditions, languages, and other vital components of their cultural identities. Without a specific land to call their own, the people of Poland found that they “had to prove that even without statehood it was possible to remain a nation” (Walicki, 1982: 28). It was largely through art that people found resolve. Influenced by nationalistic and Romantic principles, which empowered marginalised communities across Europe throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Polish artists became dedicated to investigating issues of identity, national belonging, and the social ties that bind people together.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, poets including Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Wyspiański responded to the traumatic sociopolitical situation in partitioned Poland through dramatic verse and plays. Works such as *Forefathers' Eve*, *Kordian*, and *The Wedding* were to have a profound effect not only on Polish art, but on the continuing development of the Polish national identity. To outline these canonical works briefly,

Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* was written between 1823 and 1860, and drew on folk tales, rituals, and religious imagery, illustrating mystical and highly symbolic worlds in which characters searched for strength as they were confronted with suffering and death. *Kordian*, Słowacki's 1834 dramatic verse, depicts a tragic tale of failed assassination and aggressive persecution through the creation of an archetypal figure representing Poland's struggle against the partitioning powers. Nearly seventy years later, Wyspiański wrote *The Wedding* (1901), a ghostly story that discusses Poland's fate by bringing together iconic and legendary figures from Polish history during a village wedding. Together, these artists contributed to an artistic and social movement that ignited both passion and a shared sense of common identity for those divided and suppressed by the partitions.

By the twentieth century, this approach to art was firmly cemented in Polish culture, and was continued in the theatrical work first of Osterwa and, later, of Grotowski. At the beginning of the century, Osterwa and his company Reduta intensified the social investigation of art by establishing a close community of actors dedicated to the creation of theatre practiced with religious fervour, which would engage with the "spiritual...and moral" (Braun, 1986: 235) lives of both the actors and spectators. Forty years later, Grotowski expanded upon this practice significantly, developing a monumental body of work, including his laboratory theatre work and his later experimentation in paratheatics, devoted entirely to the search for the powerful, mutual, and profound experience inherent in a meaningful encounter between people.

Poland's sociopolitical climate for the past two hundred years has played a vital role in the development of this understanding of art as an affective social process. Historically, Poland, at its height between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, was an expansive republic that stretched variably from the western edge of German Silesia to the far eastern borders of present day Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, and the Ukraine, and was home to a

diverse population of ethnic groups, including a steady flow of western European traders and settlers pushing east (Davies, 1986: 281-282). By the eighteenth century, however, Poland's weakening economy, over-extended military, and demoralised population led to a rapid dissolution. Falling victim to the three powerful empires with which it shared its borders, Poland was divided by three separate partitions implemented by the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian empires between 1773 and 1795, which effectively removed Poland from the map.

In the First Partition, Poland lost a large portion of its land along the north-eastern Lithuanian border to Russia; its southern territories, including Lwów (Lviv), to Austria; and the north-western lands surrounding Gdańsk (Danzig) to Prussia. Twenty years later, after attempting to ratify a new constitution and reverse the First Partition, Poland was further annexed in the Second Partition of 1793, where Russia and Prussia cut further into the eastern and western borders. Taking Poznań (Posen) and the land surrounding the Vistula River in the west and the majority of the Ukrainian and Belarusian territory in the east, the Second Partition left Poland with only a small strip of land down the centre of its former territory.

Two years later – in response to a bloody rebellion of 1794 led by the Polish general, Tadeusz Kościuszko – Russia, Prussia, and Austria partitioned the remaining Polish territory. By 1797, the partitioning powers agreed to “abolish everything which can recall the memory of the existence of the kingdom [sic] of Poland” (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2006: 132). These partitions remained largely in place for over a century, dissolving only after the First World War. Until that time, however, the Polish population lived under strict and oppressive foreign rule. Executing comprehensive programmes of assimilation, the occupying powers absorbed the Poles into their nations: land was revoked,

titles stripped, and the Polish language made illegal, as were Polish publications, education, and political and social organisations.

Although the three occupying powers ruled with varying degrees of severity over the 123 years of partitions, Polish political and economic autonomy was stamped out and, with it, any identifying aspects of Polish culture and heritage. The intention was that “*Poland* would cease to be, not only as a name on the map, but as an idea and an ideal in the minds of the people” (Rose, 1941: 392). Under strict censorship, and with tight suppression of both traditional and religious practices, the occupying powers forced the Polish people to abandon that which defined their national and cultural identity. As historian R. F. Leslie notes, the widespread effect of the partitions was the destruction of “not only a country, but also a community” (Leslie, 1964: 16).

Unsurprisingly, the partitions were not met with ready compliance. During this period, at least five major insurrections were attempted against the occupying empires: 1794, 1830-1, 1846, 1848-9 and 1863. Each was met with increased force and tighter control by the Russian, Austrian, and Prussian governments. The two largest and most devastating insurrections were those of 1830 and 1863. These years mark on either end a thirty-year period of increased hope, resolve, and strength against the partitioning powers, heightened by the emerging feelings of nationalism, the need to protect fiercely a sense of cultural identity, and by the emergence of Romantic thought in the former Polish territories.

While fuelled since the beginning of the partitions, the strongest period of nationalistic, Romantic sentiments in Poland began in earnest with the November Insurrection of 1830, which eventually erupted into the Russo-Polish War of 1831. It ended in disaster for the Poles, forcing approximately eighty thousand people into camps in Siberia, and as many as ten thousand fleeing to the West, either as exiles or émigrés (Davies, 1986: 167). Those who were able to escape in the Great Emigration were by and



large of the Polish intelligentsia, who, in the years following the failed insurrection, dedicated themselves to both the development and promotion of Polish culture. These exiled and displaced poets, playwrights, politicians, philosophers, and revolutionary leaders proved fundamental to maintaining Polish national identity for a community that, on paper, no longer existed.

Working in France in the nineteenth century, these members of the intelligentsia found themselves amidst a cultural revolution spreading across Europe. Responding to the seventeenth and eighteenth century's philosophy of a scientific and causal understanding of life during the Enlightenment, Romanticism offered an alternate philosophy that refused concrete and condemning distinctions between people. A. O. Lovejoy (1873-1962), who founded the field of study known as 'the history of ideas' in the early twentieth century, outlined the fundamental differences in thought behind these two systems. He argued that the crux between Enlightenment and Romanticism lay in people's understanding of what was possible in the world.

On the one hand, the Enlightenment proposed a 'finite' perception of the world, where "the first thing needful was to have precisely *defined* concepts and terms" (Lovejoy, 1941: 263). Romanticism, on the other hand, was a "revolt against 'the finite'" (ibid), embracing the notion that life could be lived in many different ways, as long as an individual or group's beliefs were held in deep conviction and determination. In this sense, Romantic thought allowed for an endless permutation of the various religious, political, and social convictions that shaped people's lives.

As a result, a significant population of previously marginalised and discriminated communities across Europe became critically aware of not only the particular religious, political, and cultural beliefs that distinguished them from the more widely accepted

structures in their societies, but, even more basically, of their basic right to *have* differing beliefs. As Isaiah Berlin argues in his lectures on the roots of Romanticism:

This is the state of mind in which people must say, ‘If I believe one thing, and you believe another, then it is important that we should fight each other. Perhaps it is good that you should kill me, or that I should kill you; perhaps, in a duel, it is best that we should kill each other; but the worst of all possible things is compromise, because that means we have both betrayed the ideal which is within us’. (Berlin, 2000: 10)

This notion of fighting to the bitter end for one’s convictions was one of extreme value to the Polish population, and one which appealed directly to the people following the devastating conclusion of the Russo-Polish War in 1831. Suppressed, but determined to protect their ideals, principles, and heritage from forced assimilation, the Poles turned inwards, fighting both for their borders and for their own traditions, beliefs, and history.

In this way, Romantic thought directly fed the revolutionary and nationalistic spirit of Poland. The members of the Great Emigration assumed the task of developing and maintaining Polish culture, but on foreign soil. Due to their efforts, they managed to “[sustain] the idea of the Polish nation. The poets were the nation’s leaders in the absence of a government and a state” (Goldfarb, 1980: 87). Poetry – such as that of Adam Mickiewicz, who will be discussed shortly – therefore cast the country as a martyr, sacrificed for the sins of the western world, and redeemed, ultimately, as a great symbol of spiritual salvation and transformation (Milosz, 1983: 226).

Since the dissolution of the partitions at the end of the First World War, continued events in Polish history necessitated resolve from the people. Despite twenty years of relative stability as an autonomous Republic from 1919-1939, Poland could not withstand the atrocities of the Second World War. From Germany’s initial attack in 1939 until the bloody Warsaw Uprising in 1944, over six million Polish citizens were killed (Lukas, 1997: 38). Of these, approximately 50 percent were Jews. Other minority groups also suffered

appalling casualties. From the Roma community to the mentally and terminally ill, not to mention intellectuals, homosexuals, and prisoners-of-war, what had once been a diverse population became subjected to discrimination and ruthless murder (Davies, 2005: 336; 344).

After the war, Poland was again occupied, becoming a Soviet satellite state for the next forty-five years – a status that was dissolved as recently as 1989. Since that time, Poland has become an autonomous democracy now participating in world economics, culture, and politics. For the last twenty years, the country has entered a period of significant reconstruction, reevaluation, and redefinition, placing Poland in a somewhat rare position of being able to consciously examine, question, and challenge its own sense of identity.

Throughout the years of the partitions and of communism, it was necessary for the survival of the people to cling to particular ideals, symbols, and cultural material that provided strength and solidarity in the face of oppression. As mentioned, the work of the Romantic poets became a vehicle for this. In this process, however, ‘Polish’ identity gradually became homogenized, vitally neglecting the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity that composed such a significant portion of Poland’s population.<sup>24</sup>

With the collapse of communism, the country has by no means had a smooth reentry into democracy. It has been faced with serious challenges and questions regarding not only its position within Western Europe as a democratic state, but – for the first time in decades – how it as a nation wants to position and define itself. Halina Filipowicz noted in 1995 that this state of uncertainty “engendered a nostalgia for certainty and security - for

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<sup>24</sup> The role of Romanticism in the construction of a ‘monolithic’ perception of Polish identity has recently come under fire. See: Halina Filipowicz (2001b) ‘Mickiewicz: ‘East’ and ‘West’, *Slavic and East European Journal* 45:4, pp. 606-623

the static closure of a mythic Polishness, which would provide a reassuring shelter from flux” (Filipowicz, 1995: 123). Essentially, as Elwira M. Grossman argues:

[T]he image of a ‘pure Pole’ was successfully fabricated for almost half a century - a totalising, homogenising drive to create such uniformity has been a defining factor in the construction of modern Polish national identity. Due to the historical, political and social circumstances any discourse on ‘the Other’ was unthinkable, and as a result there was no language to articulate the issue. It does not mean, however, that ‘the Other(s)’ did not exist or that the strong impact of its/their cultural and historical legacy disappear altogether. And yet what ‘the Other(s)’ had contributed to Poland’s multiculturalism over the past centuries has either been appropriated for the monolithic construction of ‘Polishness’ or skillfully exoticised. (Grossman, 2002: 7) <sup>25</sup>

While the theatre groups analysed in this study do not make explicit political statements regarding Polish national identity – or national identity of any kind, their work demonstrates a desire to investigate the particular characteristics that shape the way in which we understand our own identity. As will be discussed in the following chapters, by engaging with diverse populations either within Poland or around the world, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat have created an artistic practice that hinges on meetings. Whether barbers, expeditions, festivals, or performances, these groups are interested in providing a space in which people may investigate their own perceptions, beliefs, and values, coming together as individuals – with their own unique habitus, to call on Bourdieu – and, through these many shapes and forms of human identity, having a shared experience of something more profound.

This particular artistic legacy begins in Poland with the work of Juliusz Osterwa, Mieczysław Limanowski, and Reduta Theatre. Established as the first theatre laboratory in

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<sup>25</sup> For more information, see: Elwira M. Grossman (2002) ‘Introduction’ in *Studies in Language, Literature, and Cultural Mythology in Poland: Investigating ‘The Other’*, ed. Elwira M. Grossman, Slavic Studies, Vol. 7, Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, pp. 1-19; and Halina Filipowicz (2001) ‘Taboo Topics in Polish and Polish/Jewish Cultural Studies’, *The Journal of the International Institute* 9:1, Web: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.4750978.0009.103>, accessed 3 March 2012; and (2006) ‘The Wound of History: Gender Studies and Polish Particulars’ in *Poles Apart: Women in Modern Polish Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren, Indiana Slavic Studies, Vol. 15, Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, pp. 147-167). In Polish, see: Maria Janion (1995) ‘Czy bedziesz wiedzial, co przezyles’ in *Literatura i demokracja: Bezpieczne i niebezpieczne związki*, Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, pp. 121-129; and (2007) *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna: fantazmaty literatury*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie

newly independent Poland in 1919, Reduta was a tight community of artists who devoted every aspect of their lives to the creation and practice of theatre. Believing there should be “faith in art in the same way that there is faith in God” (Guszpit, forthcoming), Osterwa sought to establish a theatre with penetrating social purpose in an otherwise wounded society. This being said, he was very much a product of his time. As mentioned previously, his writings demonstrated his significant prejudices towards the Jewish community and towards women, which by no means indicates an inclusive, open, and tolerant theatre practice.<sup>26</sup> However, because so much of his work was focused on creating an environment where the lines between artistic creation, work, and social life were blurred, certain aspects of his work have laid an important foundation for the future development of performance as a fundamentally social phenomenon.

It was with Grotowski’s work with the Laboratory Theatre in the 1960s and, later, with his paratheatrical investigations of the 1970s and 1980s that this approach to performance became more fully developed. Although his body of work changed drastically over the course of his lifetime, Grotowski never shifted from the desire to create an environment in which people would encounter one another; he searched for the experience of an encounter between people that could transcend everyday divisions, assumptions, and expectations.

Developing a physically and vocally demanding actor’s training that in time has come to revolutionize theatre practices internationally, Grotowski’s actors worked to strip themselves bare of their body’s habits and patterns in order to enter into what Jan Błoński observed as ““a consummation of communication...[with] visible, enacted reciprocity””

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<sup>26</sup> As noted in the Introduction, English-language materials regarding Osterwa and Reduta are few and far between. The most telling account of his personal views is provided by his own hand in the forthcoming translation by Paul Vickers of Osterwa’s letters: *Through Theatre, Beyond Theatre*, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press.

(Kumiega, 1985: 162) with the audience. Through the act of self-sacrifice, Grotowski encouraged his actors to seek a level of authentic, human vulnerability in order that they may guide the spectators on a transformative journey of self-discovery.

Since then, this understanding of theatre as a dynamic social force has continued to develop. Influenced by this long history of artistic investigation by Polish artists, more contemporary groups such as the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat have taken significant steps in exploring even wider possibilities for a socially oriented theatre practice, expanding beyond Poland's own sociopolitical context and reaching into the wider world. These groups' unique approaches to performance, whether the Odin's theatre anthropology and barbers, Gardzienice's expeditions and gatherings, or Song of the Goat's coordination training and annual Brave Festival, all of which will be discussed in the following chapters, indicate their dedication to performance as a connective, *connecting*, social force.

The belief in the theatre's strong restorative, transformative potential in the social world holds profound promise for the future development of theatre. As demonstrated by artists before them – Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Wyspiański, Osterwa, and Grotowski, to name but a few – theatre has a powerful, responsive relationship with its social environment. By reflecting upon and challenging the world around them through innovative practices anchored in the sociopolitical conditions of Poland's past, these artists collectively compose a long tradition of performance work deeply committed to social responsibility.

### **The Partitions and Polish Nationalism**

The roots of this artistic legacy in Poland began effectively with the country's dissolution at the end of the eighteenth century. Prior to the partitions, Polish territory – first as the Kingdom of Poland (966-1569) and later as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-

1772) – enjoyed relative peace and prosperity as an autonomous state. With a vast territory that stretched into modern day Germany to the west, incorporated Belarus and Ukraine to the east, and moved as far south as Romania, Poland was a part of a major trading route between Asia and the Atlantic.

Throughout this early period of Poland’s history, its territory was composed of a remarkably diverse population, including Balts, Celts, Germans, Jews, Lits, Lettes, Mazovians, Romanians, Ruthenes, and Slavs, all of whom contributed to a mixed composite of beliefs, traditions, languages, and cultures (Davies, 1986: 281-282). Accordingly, Poland at this time has been marked by its particularly high tolerance of diverse religions, ethnicities, and cultural practices, and included an early attempt at a rudimentary form of democracy, albeit one that was accessible only to the nobles and landed gentry.<sup>27</sup>

By the eighteenth century, however, weakening political infrastructure, increasing social discontent due to famine and plague, an over-extended military, and escalating tensions with Russia led the territory to concede its autonomy as a preventative measure against potential aggression from the Empire. In 1717, the Republic became an official Russian protectorate, which drastically limited the government’s power by forcing it “to accept a Russian guarantee of [Polish] laws and constitution, and even for [Polish] territory” (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2006: 116). With increasing unrest and instability in Poland, the Russian Empire kept the territory under strict surveillance.

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<sup>27</sup> One of the most significant elements of Poland’s early democracy is that of the *liberum veto*, a sacred right of objection that could be raised in the Diet by any one member, created with the intention to protect even the smallest minority. As a side note, this burgeoning attempt at tolerance seems sadly ironic, considering the severe injustice and intolerance imposed upon Poland in its later history, including not only the partitions, but, perhaps most poignantly, the tragic events of the Second World War. For further information on the *liberum veto* and other aspects of the Republic of Poland-Lithuania’s political system, see Andrzej Walicki (1982) *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 11-28; Norman Davies (1986) *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 250-254; 316-327; and P. Skwarczyński (1941) ‘The Constitution of Poland before the Partitions’ in *The Cambridge History of Poland: From Augustus II to Pilsudski (1697-1935)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 49-71

In addition to its new Polish acquisition, the Russian Empire continued its military campaigns against the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, which over time began to raise deep suspicions with the neighbouring Austrian Empire. With the empires “wary of anything that might bring new strength and resources to the others” (Lukowski, 1999: 52), Frederick of Prussia suggested a three-way partition of Poland’s borders, which would provide roughly equal territorial gains to each neighbouring empire.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, this act extended their borders, separating each empire by creating a military buffer between them. In 1773, the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian Empires agreed to the First Partition of Poland, which was followed by the Second Partition in 1793 and, shortly thereafter, by the Third Partition, in 1795. These remained largely in place until 1918.

Throughout the next century and a half, the three empires established varying degrees of authority and alternating levels of control over their annexed territories. As mentioned previously, each empire executed a comprehensive assimilation programme that banned the Polish language from schools, administrative offices, and courts, and dissolved the existing political system, in addition to implementing a severe mandatory military conscription, censorship, and high taxation. However, the pattern and consistency of these regulations depended on the sociopolitical climate in each individual empire and the level of unrest in its annexed Polish territory. For this reason, a unified Polish attitude towards and influence of the respective partitioning powers was highly variable from region to region.

In Prussia, the government’s restrictions indicated an early attempt to integrate the western Polish provinces into its Empire, and approached its new members as citizens of

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<sup>28</sup> This highly political move, which involved a long series of schemes and complicated negotiations between Austrian, Prussian, and Russian rulers, suggested by Frederick of Prussia is best explained in W. F. Reddaway’s chapter, “The First Partition” in *The Cambridge History of Poland: from Augustus II to Pilsudski (1697-1935)*, op. cit., pp. 88-111



Prussia. While maintaining control over its annexed territory, it also offered incentives such as a well-developed education system, voting rights to all men over the age of twenty-five, and significant religious tolerance. As Frederick William III specified to the Poles living in his domain in 1815:

And you will have a fatherland....You will be incorporated into my monarchy without being required to give up your nationality. You will have a share in the constitution which I intend to give my faithful subjects, and you will receive, as will all other provinces of my country, a provincial status. (Feldman, 1941: 345)

In contrast with the Polish territories under Russian and Austrian rule, the Prussian Empire left some level of autonomy to the people; based in the largely Polish-populated northern Duchy of Posen, the Poles there were allowed for a time to continue their Polish-based schools, churches, clubs, and governmental representation.

However, the strong push for Polish independence from the Duchy suggested the ultimate “impossibility of a reconciliation” (ibid.: 349) between Prussia and the former Polish territory. Restrictions tightened following a failed rebellion in 1846 and, with Bismarck’s introduction of *Kulturkampf* in the 1870s, the social, economic, and political situation for the Poles in Prussia had deteriorated. Despite this, they did manage to win significant concessions over the course of the partitions. Considering the severity of the situations in the Polish provinces under Russian and Austrian rule, those living in Prussia enjoyed a generally “friendly reception and generous support” (Feldman, 1941: 355) from the Prussian population.

The situation for the Poles in the Austrian territory of Galicia, which included Kraków and extended into present day Slovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine, was quite different. With an overpopulated land of destitute peasants devoid of resources, it could be said that, of “the three foreign governments ruling over Poland none was then so hard on the Poles as the Austrian” (ibid.: 338). Immediately following the partitions, the Austrian government

imposed a steep increase in taxation, in addition to strict censorship, the mandatory use of German in all spheres of education and in the courts, and tightly controlled borders by a strong police force. These restrictions, combined with the territory's extreme impoverishment, led to staggering rates of emigration and death, where up to fifty thousand people a year were dying from starvation (Davies, 2005: 106).

These conditions did not improve over time; in fact, they worsened steadily following a peasant rebellion of 1846 in Kraków.<sup>29</sup> However, by the late nineteenth century, the Austrian Empire became increasingly focused on maintaining its authority as its empire began to falter, which eased its grip on Galicia significantly. As restrictions escalated in both the Prussian and Russian territories in the latter half of the nineteenth century, those living in Galicia enjoyed a relaxation of sociopolitical and cultural control, which provided a unique opportunity for those living in the region to continue the development of Polish culture, a situation that will be discussed later in this chapter.

The conditions of Polish life in Russia were perhaps the most variable. While the empire regulated the Catholic Church, forcing many people to convert to Russian Orthodoxy, it did allow both the Polish and Lithuanian school systems to remain initially in place. Local governments, as well, were kept in operation for a time, despite being kept under close surveillance (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2006: 137). However, this leniency did not last. Spurred by a long, persistent string of rebellions, insurrections, and unrest from approximately 1820 until 1890, Russia became the Polish population's most severe aggressor.

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<sup>29</sup> Kraków had originally fallen under Austrian control in the Third Partition of 1795. However, during Napoleon's push east, it was annexed by the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807. Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the partitioning powers created the Free City of Kraków, under joint protection of all three empires. The result of the 1846 rebellion, in which over 2000 landowners were slaughtered, was the annexation of the Kraków back into the Austrian Empire. See: Norman Davies (2005) *God's Playground: A History of Poland, Vol. II: 1795 to Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 246

By the late nineteenth century, drastic restrictions were introduced: a compulsory twenty-five year military conscription for peasants was established, severe censorship instated, borders were garrisoned, estates confiscated, the right to buy or be given land made illegal, and the Russian language comprehensively replaced Polish in schools, courts, and all administrative buildings (Rose, 1941: 390). With these actions, the Russian Empire “increasingly sought, not to thrash the Poles into submission...but rather to wear them down by depriving them of all the spiritual and cultural resources which make life tolerable” (Davies, 2005: 80).

The emerging pattern at the end of the nineteenth century was one of endless push-and-pull: as the occupiers relaxed their grip, the Poles seized the opportunity to fight; as the Poles fought, the occupying powers revoked any former privileges and tightened control (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2006: 174). For their part, the Polish population refused to accept the situation. Fighting back in bursts of rebellion, insurrection, subversion, and spontaneous uprising, the people pushed back at their aggressors in an attempt to protect every last vestige of their cultural heritage, despite the fact that these attempts rarely resulted in any permanent political gains. In this way, the people seemed to take to heart Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s advice to Poland: ““If you cannot prevent your enemies from swallowing you..., at least you can prevent them from digesting you”” (Davies, 1986: 353).

The largest and most devastating insurrections took place in 1830 and 1863 in Warsaw. Directed primarily at Russian rule, both resulted in severe consequences for Poles in all territories. The 1830 November Insurrection, later escalating into the Russo-Polish War of 1830-1831, was a catastrophic event. In 1807, Napoleon’s conquests had repartitioned a section of Prussian’s Polish territory and created the Duchy of Warsaw, which was a small semi-autonomous territory under French authority.

Following Napoleon's defeat in 1815, the Congress of Vienna allocated this land as a constitutional monarchy under the Russian Tsar, which assured relaxed restrictions and gave Poles in the Congress Kingdom relative political, economic, and social freedom. However, in 1830, a "reckless" (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2006: 157) plot developed to assassinate the Kingdom's Russian viceroy. Poorly planned and even more poorly executed, the November Insurrection became uncontrollable, provoking violent mobs and a series of unnecessary and accidental murders of high-ranking Polish officials (Davies, 2005: 234). The Russian Empire responded and, after a year of strong defense but low morale and disorganization, the Polish army collapsed.

The November Insurrection gave Tsar Nicholas I an incentive to bring Poland fully under the Russian control once again. Eighty thousand people were deported; ten thousand exiled or fled; political and military officials were put to death; and the people were forced to pay 2 million roubles in reparations (ibid.: 244). The minimal gains that had been won for the Congress Kingdom fifteen years earlier were revoked, culminating in the introduction of martial law by the Russian Empire in 1833. Prussia and Austria took measures against their Polish territories as well; all three empires "committed to the suppression of all revolutionary activity" (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2006: 163). There were also direct cultural and national ramifications: the Tsar ordered all flags, banners, thrones, and medals, the sword of General Kosciuszko, and the entire University Library to be taken from Warsaw. In his own words, Tsar Nicholas ordered his army to "gradually remove everything that has historical or national value, and deliver it here; also the flag from the Royal Castle" (Davies, 2005: 244).

The January Rising of 1863 was no less devastating. With the ascension of Tsar Alexander II in 1855, a series of moderate freedoms eased tensions in the Congress Kingdom. He granted amnesty to those exiled in Siberia from the Russo-Polish War,

resurrected the Polish Academy of Medicine and Surgery, and reinstated the right to assemble (Davies, 2005: 257; Coleman, 1941: 367-8). Over time, religious processions, demonstrations, and secret organisations under the guise of study or hobby groups began to flourish. These small allowances, however, fuelled a desire for increased freedoms. “[E]very unusual event and every national anniversary was made the occasion for a more passionate demonstration than the one before. ... Every date in the calendar which an event of 1830-31 had underlined was marked by mass demonstrations” (Coleman, 1941: 371).

Attempts to quell the enthusiastic public eventually ignited into a full-blown attack of highly organized insurgents. Composed of ordinary people, operating an elaborate underground movement in full view of the presiding government, this group created complex codes based on Mickiewicz’s dramatic verse, *Pan Tadeusz*, which were never broken; held secret meetings in full-view of the public, in either churches or at cafes; and kept their offices in a biology laboratory, otherwise in cellars and closets (Davies, 2005: 266). For fifteen months, these insurgents carried out over one-thousand attacks throughout the countryside of the Congress Kingdom, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus before being defeated in 1864 (Walicki, 1982: 337).

The Russian Empire’s response to these insurgencies was inflexible. As Davies explains, “[T]he Tsarist authorities were determined not merely to eradicate all trace of the late insurrection but also to suppress all public manifestations of Polish nationality” (Davies, 2005: 268). The leaders of the Rising were exiled, imprisoned, or hanged. Every previous concession was revoked, and a full programme of Russification was implemented yet again. The Congress Kingdom of Poland was divided in 1867 and absorbed into the Russian Empire as the Vistula Territories (Leslie, 1980: 39).

From this moment on, the Polish population, not only in the Russian territories, but also in Prussia and Austrian Galicia, by and large abandoned their rebellions. The public

sentiment was that a more conciliatory attitude might be necessary in order to maintain some semblance of normal life. Polish novelist Józef Kraszewski (1812-1887) begged the Poles to “[g]uard and cherish the Polish hearth...and above all, be done with insurrections” (Coleman, 1941: 386). However, while this mentality lingered for the remaining years of the nineteenth century, quieting revolutionary activities significantly, the spirit of these insurrections, rebellions, and dogged resistance held firm within the evolving Polish national consciousness.

In light of this history, it is possible to better understand the intense drive behind the development of a unified Polish national identity. Prior to the partitions, the large multi-ethnic population of Poland had not necessarily identified with being labelled ‘Polish’. Although the nobles of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had considered themselves Polish, the larger population of peasants identified themselves as ethnically and culturally diverse communities: Mazovians, Kashubians, Lithuanians, Jews, Ruthenes, and so on, all living within a vast territory that up until the partitions had been only loosely defined as ‘Polish’. To emphasize this point, Davies cites that in 1650, only 40 percent of the inhabitants of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth considered themselves to be Polish (Davies, 2005: 133).

Redrawing borders through towns, villages, and communities that had coexisted for centuries, the partitions caused a distinctive shift in the people’s perception of their own identities. Through the varied programmes of assimilation executed by the three partitioning powers, the diverse populations of the Polish territories were forced to abandon their own political affiliations and allegiances, religious beliefs, and linguistic, social, and cultural practices.

The partitions therefore caused a social fissure within the territories’ populations. On one hand, these divisions created feelings of solidarity within many different

communities throughout the region – a trend that has continued into contemporary times with the declaration of new, independent states such as Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, and Ukraine, to name a few. On the other hand, the partitions cultivated stronger associations within the population of what it meant to be ‘Polish’. As Davies’ statistics further illustrate, 65 percent of the population claimed Polish nationality by 1900; 88 percent in 1944; and in 1951, a staggering 99 percent (Davies, 2005: 133).

Throughout the nineteenth century, people were certainly conscious of the differences in language, religion, and culture between themselves and other ethnic and cultural groups living in Polish territory. Polish national identity at that time, as Brian Porter argues, had more to do with Poland acting as a universal symbol of freedom from oppression. He elaborates:

For the first half of the nineteenth century, to speak of national liberation in Poland was to imagine a chiliastic moment of emancipation for all humanity – ‘for our freedom and yours,’ as the slogan of the day put it. Polish patriots of that era were *not* fighting for a ‘Poland for the Poles,’ and ethnicity was *not* the prism through which they perceived their world. Although they were concerned with issues of language and culture, they employed a definition of the nation that permitted (and often explicitly mandated) that Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and even Jews be accepted as Poles. (Porter, 2000: 6) <sup>30</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, nationalism in Poland began to move away from this open plea for emancipation towards a specific focus on “concrete enemies”, which demanded a heightened level of “ideological and cultural unity within the nation” (Porter, 2000: 7). This phenomenon is particularly evident when considering the devastating effects of the First and Second World Wars on the population in Poland, both events that led to an increased and powerful sense of national unity and solidarity amongst the people, as evidenced by Davies’ demographic statistics listed above.

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<sup>30</sup> The work of Adam Mickiewicz and his messianistic views of Poland are particularly indicative of this fight – as will be seen in the following section.

Heightened national unity following the wars also demonstrates that sentiments such as unity and solidarity emerge through confrontation, as people are faced with an imminent threat of losing that which identifies them culturally, socially, politically, and economically – be it through forced use of a foreign language, the closure of churches and social institutions, the removal of local governmental authorities, or the introduction of foreign tariffs and high taxation. Against people's will, and against their freedom and right as people to choose their own destinies, these actions force individuals to seek comfort in commonality and in the practice of shared beliefs.

The French philosopher, Ernest Renan (1823-1892), confirms this point. In his 1882 discourse on the nature of nationalism, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, Renan argues that “common suffering is greater than happiness. In fact, national sorrows are more significant than triumphs because they impose obligations and demand a common effort” (Hutchinson and Smith, 1994: 17). In this way, it is possible to understand that the partitions precipitated an unwavering commitment to defining, preserving, protecting, and maintaining the very substance of what it meant to be Polish.

### **Romantic Thought in Poland**

This early development of nationalism among the Polish population gave rise to a widespread adoption of the Romantic principles that had been developing across Europe since the late eighteenth century. A literary, cultural, philosophical, political, and spiritual movement stemming particularly from Germany – although independent movements also occurred in France, Spain, and Russia – Romanticism found support amongst individuals struggling against rigid social hierarchies, substandard living conditions, political and religious discontent, and social alienation as a result of increased industrialization.



Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) notes of these conditions that, “when the natural road towards human fulfillment is blocked, human beings retreat into themselves...and try to create inwardly that world which some evil fate has denied them externally” (Berlin, 2000: 36-37). Rooted in Pietism, an early strand of German Lutheranism that discarded a dogmatic approach to religion in favor of a more personal, intimate relationship with God, Romanticism offered solace and, equally, a sense of greater justification for difficult life conditions – a point, as will be shortly discussed, to which the Polish Romantics were particularly attracted.

Since the seventeenth century, the established philosophical system of the Enlightenment had promoted a strictly rational approach to the social, moral, religious, political, and cultural life of an individual. The prevailing mentality during this period was one of singularity of mind and practice:

The presupposition that had been dominant for some two centuries...may be called uniformitarianism. Uniformitarianism is the assumption that what is most important, most valuable, normal, in men consists in what is the same in all men, and that their actual diversities in opinion and cultures and forms of government are evidences of departure from the norm of human life. (Lovejoy, 1941: 275-276)

Influenced by important scientific advances of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by people such as Newton, Pascal, Descartes, and Voltaire, in addition to society’s corresponding shift into industrialization, this uniform understanding of the world required a causal, rational, and highly definable understanding of the world.

Over time, these principles began to shape society’s views of individual life. Berlin notes that “if this kind of order could be instituted in the world of physics, the same methods would produce equally splendid and lasting results in the worlds of morals, politics, aesthetics, and in the rest of the chaotic world of human opinion” (Berlin, 2000: 24). As a result, an individual’s life came to be seen as determinable, operating within a finite system of familiar and identifiable values. A certain sense of security surrounded

those known quantities existing within the accepted system, precipitating an expectation that everything should fit within that system. With a philosophy focused on “the accumulation of data upon which general propositions could be constructed, telling one what to do, how to live, what to be” (Berlin, 2000: 29), little space was available for anything beyond the established, accepted norm.

Ultimately, however, this approach failed to account for the multitudes of values, faiths, principles, opinions, and tastes that fell outside the accepted system. As A. O. Lovejoy asserts, the “most prevalent and orthodox tendency had been to think in terms of finites... [I]n human character and conduct, the mark of excellence was to observe metes and bounds and to be moderate in all one’s desires, ambitions and pretensions” (Lovejoy, 1941: 263). The tenets of Romanticism, on the other hand, “were in conscious and zealous...revolt against all these assumptions” (ibid).

Emphasising responsiveness and interconnection between people and the world, Romanticism proposed that an individual life was representative of a vast network of connections linking each individual to other individuals, to nature, to his or her environment, and to God. As argued by Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), “No man is only a man, but really and in truth he can and should also be the whole of humanity” (Anderson, 1941: 303). By focusing not only on the nature of the individual, but on that individual as an essential piece to a much greater whole, this philosophy provided a vital sense of purpose and belonging, allowing people to envision a greater, benevolent design for their lives. Berlin explains:

[T]he self is no longer identified with the individual but with some super-personal entity, such as a community...Church...State...or a class...which imposes its particular personality both upon the outside world and upon its own constituent elements...thereby reduc[ing people into] some much bigger, much more impressive, much more historically persistent personality. (Berlin, 2000: 95)

Romanticism therefore created a potential in which people could hold meaning of their own in relation to the larger world around them, empowering them to invest in their communities by providing a sense of pride and purpose, obligation, and responsibility towards others.

In the nineteenth century, this Romantic understanding of group identity collided with developing nationalistic sentiments. While neither Romanticism nor nationalism gave direct rise to the other, Miroslav Hroch points out that they both grew out of a shared

crisis of identity, ...brought about by changes...of the modern era: the loss of religious legitimacy and also therefore the loss of axiomatically formulated principles, the weakening of the old traditional feudal and patriarchal bonds, and, from that, the loss of security. (Trencsenyi and Kopecek, 2007: 7)

Emphasizing tight bonds of unity and solidarity within communities, and rebuilding vital links between individuals, Romanticism and the development of nationalism in Poland served as a means to revalue a sense of belonging that gave meaning to people's lives.

This was a concept that resonated strongly with the Polish population in the nineteenth century. As discussed earlier, the partitions had destroyed any earlier feelings of national or cultural solidarity; the "old sense of common belonging was lost" (Davies, 1986: 252). Struggling against these divisions, the forced programmes of assimilation, and cultural, linguistic, and religious persecution, the diverse Polish population fought to maintain their individual rights as distinct cultural groups. Although insurgencies and political rebellions played a significant role in combating their situation, the comprehensive division of the territory's military, economy, and resources caused the uprisings to have little lasting effect against the partitioning powers. In the end, it was a much more subtle tactic that preserved the cultural and social lives of the people.

Following the conclusive Polish defeat in the Russo-Polish War of 1831, approximately 10,000 Poles fled the former territories or were forced into exile. Referred to

as the Great Emigration, a vast majority of Poland's political, religious, cultural, and military leaders – “overwhelmingly male, of course, and mostly without families” (Koropeczyk, 2008: 186), who were committed to the fight for independence, found themselves exiled, with no homeland to speak of, and with a crushed sense of hope following the failed insurrection. Determined to do everything in their power to “save Poland and to hasten the hour of their return to their country” (Gardner, 1941: 325), these politicians, scholars, scientists, and artists, who settled primarily in France, made Paris the new revolutionary hotbed of Polish resistance.

Organizing and producing a vast number of articles, lectures, social gatherings, philosophical and religious treatises, and art, these displaced exiles openly decried the fate of their nation and mourned the loss of their homeland. With atrocious conditions in the former territories, including increased restrictions on language, heightened censorship, and disempowered political and cultural autonomy, the work of these highly influential exiles became the core of the Polish nation. Unable to take direct action against the partitioning powers, the divided population came to understand that “in order to survive [they] had to prove their cultural vitality by creating a consciously national literature, philosophy, and art” (Walicki, 1982: 72). Thoughts, images, emotions, and the imagination were something that could not be suppressed. The population of Poland therefore threw their energy into those conceptual and artistic forms that could protect, defend, and cultivate the forbidden ideals, beliefs, traditions, languages, and principles that defined the people as separate from the cultures into which they had been forcibly absorbed.

Rising to the forefront of this period were the poets, who embodied a highly political, philosophical, and spiritual means through which to address the situation that had befallen the Polish people. Monica Gardner asserts that poetry

was the only means of keeping the national ideals alive, of teaching the Polish youth their persecuted and forbidden heritage, of saving the nation from atrophy and despair and the moral destruction of a conquered people. The Polish poets became the moral leaders of the nation. (Gardner, 1941: 325)

Through their work, these exiled poets combined a deep longing for their homeland, its people, its iconography, and its cultural traditions with a desperate and powerful need for justification, continued resistance, and ultimate salvation from national suffering.

In this way, “an impassioned patriotism that takes the sacred lineaments of a religion became the basic principle of Poland’s romantic literature” (ibid.). Cultural symbols in the form of religious imagery, wistful landscapes, old melodies, legends, mythologies, battles, heroes, traditional customs, and rites became sacred components of Polish Romantic art. To recall Porter’s argument, it was particularly this kind of spiritual nostalgia that led to a more universal appeal for emancipation that shaped the early nineteenth-century conception of nationalism. As Maria Janion and Maria Żmigrodzka note, the Romantics sought to create both “a world of spiritual freedom...together with a purpose, and a method of bearing the burden of a terrible reality” (Davies, 1983: 233-234).

A host of artists dedicated themselves to this search for redemption. While this included many skilled writers, poets, and playwrights such as Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859), Aleksander Fredro (1793-1876), and Cyprian Norwid (1821-1883), this study will focus specifically on the two Romantic poets Mickiewicz and Słowacki, and the neo-Romantic poet, Wyspiański, three artists who had a particular influence on the later development of theatre in Poland. Writing at the height of the Romantic period between the two failed insurrections of 1830 and 1863, Mickiewicz and Słowacki created powerful poetry and dramatic verse laden with strong cultural images and allegories, which grew to fill a deep need in Polish society for solidarity, resolve, and justification for their suffering. Later in the century, Wyspiański was combating an entirely different environment. Failed

insurrections had given way to increased malaise and ambivalence. Working as part of Young Poland (Młoda Polska), an artistic movement emerging from Kraków, Wyspiański dedicated himself to reigniting the revolutionary spirit of the Polish people.

While it is commonly believed that Mickiewicz's work was not staged in his lifetime, documentation uncovered by Zbigniew Jędrychowski has proved that, despite severe censorship, a section of Mickiewicz's play *Forefathers' Eve* was in fact performed in 1832.<sup>31</sup> This being said, his work and that of other Romantic poets during this time was not easily accessible, either onstage or in publication, as their writings were strictly prohibited by the censors in the partitioned territories. This caused much of their work to be passed on in an oral tradition after being smuggled in and distributed through the underground movements (Koropecyk, 2008: 192).

Mickiewicz is perhaps the most influential Polish poet of this period, revered even today as the national bard of Poland. Writing the majority of his works between 1822 and 1835, his poetry captured the sentiments of a population struggling against the partitions. Mickiewicz himself was a product of the extreme restructuring of the eastern Polish-Lithuanian border. Born in 1798 into the newly designated Russian territory of Lithuania, which, to complicate matters, was largely populated by Belarusians (Milosz, 1983: 208), Mickiewicz today is claimed by Poles, Lithuanians, and Belarusians alike.

Written primarily during his exile in Russia and, later, in France as part of the Great Emigration, Mickiewicz's poetry is infused with appropriately amalgamated imagery: writing in Polish, he wove stories that depicted the lives of common people – from

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<sup>31</sup> See Halina Filipowicz (2001b) 'Mickiewicz: 'East' and 'West'', *Slavic and East European Journal* 45:4, pp. 606-7; and p. 612. In discussing this and the commonly cited 'first' staging of *Forefathers' Eve* in 1901 by Wyspiański, she notes: "to publicize the fact that it had been possible to stage *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*] before 1901 despite censorship restrictions or that Wyspiański's decision to cut 46 per cent of Mickiewicz's text for the 1901 production outraged professors of Polish literature at the Jagiellonian University of Cracow would be an affront to patriotic decorum" (Filipowicz, 2001b: 606-7). See also: Halina Filipowicz (1999) 'Performing Bodies, Performing Mickiewicz: Drama as Problem in Performance Studies', *Slavic and East European Journal* 43:1, pp. 1-18, particularly footnote 11 on p. 15.

Lithuanian peasants and villagers to Polish priests, judges, and soldiers – with Belarusian and Lithuanian folklore, customs, pagan rituals, religious symbols, and landscapes of the region.<sup>32</sup> Marked by his powerful use of rhythm and melody, his works incorporated strong themes of patriotism and solidarity, tinged with nostalgia and laments for the past.<sup>33</sup>

Despite being banned from the partitioned territories, Mickiewicz's poetry found an enthusiastic audience amongst a broad range of people. When writing from France, his works were smuggled into Poland before being 'officially' released. As Koropecykj notes:

Mickiewicz...insisted on secrecy, with the hope...of getting the work to readers in Poland before the partitioning authorities could catch on. To this end, 'the publishers conceal[ed] its existence as conscientiously as possible, until it [made] it to the homeland, since Pozzo di Borgo [the Russian ambassador in Paris] might [have] prevented it from going into circulation.' After a lengthy 'quarantine,' during which time...others indeed managed to smuggle copies of the volume into Poland, *Forefathers' Eve*, part 3, finally went on sale in Paris. (Koropecykj, 2008: 192)

Part of the work's lasting appeal, according to Czeslaw Milosz, was that it attracted not only the educated aristocratic classes, but the peasants and unschooled: "servant girls, valets, and people barely able to read suddenly found something close to their hearts and quite understandable without any recourse to learning" (Milosz: 1983: 213).

Another important aspect of Mickiewicz's work was his fascination with the rise of the common man into greatness and ultimate sacrifice. An example of this can be seen in works such as *Konrad Wallenrod*, written in 1828 as a metaphor for the escalating tensions

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<sup>32</sup> For an interesting discussion of references to the Kabbalah in Mickiewicz's work, see: Stuart Goldberg (2001) 'Konrad and Jacob: A Hypothetical Kabbalistic Subtext in Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, Part III', *Slavic and East European Journal* 45:4, pp. 695-715.

<sup>33</sup> Because of the nature of his work, Filipowicz observes that it has become too common in Poland today for Mickiewicz to be "conflated...as an embodiment and endorsement of...canonical memory" (Filipowicz, 2001b: 610) – of Polish heritage, history, contributing to a misguided interpretation of a 'monolithic' Polish identity. She argues that, instead, his "texts work in unexpected ways: they go forward and sideways, unorthodoxly zig-zagging and heretically circling, shuttling back and forth between cultures, between past and future, forever threatening to destabilize the canonical memory" (Filipowicz, 2001b: 610).

More information and analysis into Mickiewicz's work can be found in: Halina Filipowicz (ed.) (2001) Forum: Mickiewicz: 'East' and 'West', *Slavic and East European Journal* 45:4, pp. 605-731. See also: Roman Koropecykj (2008) *Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of a Romantic*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

between Russia and Poland. Wallenrod, a pagan Lithuanian raised by the devoutly Catholic Teutonic Knights, has abandoned his past and become a high officer of the Knights' campaign against his home country. However, upon hearing an old traditional Lithuanian melody, Wallenrod realises that he has acted as a traitor to his people and vows to sabotage the Teutonic raids from within the knights' order. However, he is unable to find peace and ultimately commits suicide in an attempt to redeem himself. Acting as a reminder to the people of Poland to stay true to their ideals and to their heritage, and to honour those convictions to the death, *Konrad Wallenrod* sought to strengthen the Polish resolve in the face of oppression.

Dramatic verse was a form that Mickiewicz favoured highly. According to him, drama was a state in which “poetry is transformed into action before the audience... The destiny of art is to stimulate, or rather...to force lazy spirits into action” (Mickiewicz cited in Milosz, 1983: 353). For Mickiewicz, the written word only went so far as to incite this action. What he sought throughout his life was for language to inspire not only conviction, but a burning desire to confront oppression. Koropecykj records:

‘It is not enough to publish books and propagate systems,’ Mickiewicz proclaimed, ‘it is necessary to demonstrate the reality of these systems through strength, through life’ – in other words, a philosophy of deed. (Koropecykj, 2008: 319)

In fact, as Koropecykj elaborates further, Mickiewicz believed in “the written word as deed, the primacy of spirit, the relationship of man and nature and of man and the spiritual world” (ibid.).

This integration of word, action and spirituality is strongly evident in Mickiewicz's most famous play, the four-part *Forefathers' Eve (Dziady)*, which was written largely on either end of the November Insurrection. The play was not composed in chronological order: Mickiewicz outlined the first part, and wrote the second and fourth parts in full during his time in Wilno in 1823; the third part was added ten years later from Dresden. As



a whole, the play is a complex, dark, and dream-like tale, set during the ritual of Forefathers' Eve, or *dziady*. Practiced in Lithuania and observed on All Souls' Day, this tradition blends pagan rites with Christianity, summoning a community's ancestors and the souls of the dead that remain in Purgatory by offering them food and drink to ease their suffering.<sup>34</sup>

In essence *Forefathers' Eve* is a kind of "morality play", illustrating the "story of a man surrounded by supernatural powers and struggling for his salvation" (Milosz, 1983.: 222). Beginning with Part Two, which is seen as a kind of overture, a series of spirits appear to those gathered for the ritual and issue warnings against the temptations and sins of life. Two of the spirits are those of young children who caution that peace in heaven will never come if a person does not experience suffering during their lifetime. Another soul is tortured by birds of prey that feed upon him, stealing any offerings that may provide relief because in life he lacked mercy and kindness.

The last soul to arrive is that of a young man. He arrives uninvited and refuses to speak or to leave, disrupting the ritual and confusing the people. This character seems to reappear in Part Four, as a man named Gustaw, who visits a priest late one evening, relating a tragic love story told as if from beyond the grave.<sup>35</sup> Part Three of *Forefathers' Eve*, which was written following the failed 1830 uprising, transforms this tragic lover from Parts Two and Four into a prisoner who is "dedicated to the cause of his nation and of humanity" (Milosz, 1983: 222). Through scenes that interweave reality with dream, Mickiewicz

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<sup>34</sup> Notable productions for this study include Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre's performance in 1961, and Staniewski's regular use of textual fragments of the poem for *An Evening Performance* (1977), *Sorcery* (1981), and *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum* (1983). Following the Second World War, the play continued to be censored by the Polish communist government "because of its emotional impact on the audience" (Milosz, 1983: 223). Mickiewicz's play is still revived periodically as a canonical piece of Polish literature in present day Poland, although – as noted previously – his work has grown to be widely misinterpreted as a symbol for a 'monolithic' understanding of Polish identity.

<sup>35</sup> From Czeslaw Milosz (1983) *The History of Polish Literature*, second ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 215-217

creates a world in which heaven, hell, and earth coincide as the protagonist demands to understand how God can allow such devastating human suffering (Milosz, 1983: 222-223).

As Koropecykj elaborates:

*Forefathers' Eve* was nothing less than a 'prophetic manifesto,' a vision of Poland's past, present, and future inscribed by and in its own particularist way itself inscribing the struggle between cosmic good and evil. And it was the vision of a poet, an aggressively, even hypertrophically romantic poet, 'inspired by God's spirit,' whose power of imagination – his genius – in effect sanctioned his presumption to intercede on behalf of his people before God, 'a kind of Messiah for that poor nation.' Over the course of the ensuing decades, when Poland did not exist as a state, this power ostensibly guaranteed that it would continue to exist as a nation and that even in the face of defeat and dislocation, persecution and indifference, it would one day bring about Poland's resurrection. (Koropecykj, 2008: 193)

Through this play, Mickiewicz's obsession with messianism, sacrifice, and spiritual salvation becomes increasingly evident. Later in life, he became involved in a religious cult under the leadership of Andrzej Towiański, and began to devote his work almost solely to propagating the belief that the suffering of both Poland and its people was necessary in order to achieve ultimate redemption through the coming of a Messiah: "a *collective* and *terrestrial* salvation of mankind" (Walicki, 1982: 241). In this way, Mickiewicz attempted to justify the devastating situation of the present through poetry which promoted a belief that people's "sufferings were not in vain, since, like the sufferings of Christ, they served as a purifying force of the general redemption and regeneration of mankind" (ibid.: 244).

Amongst the émigré population in France, this belief – and his religious fervor in disseminating it – was not blindly accepted and, in fact, became quite controversial as demonstrated by accounts of his lectures at the Collège de France in the later years of his life. However, by linking emancipation with spirituality, and word with deed, Mickiewicz contributed directly and vitally to the development of nationalist thought in Poland. As Porter elaborates:

The Polish patriot of the early nineteenth century *enacted* the nation rather than *embodying* it. As patriotic Polish intellectuals tried to cope with the loss of

statehood after the third partition in 1795...they removed their nation from the material world in which tyrants could destroy and oppress, and they relocated it onto a transcendent, spiritual plane. Poland was no longer a mere community for them but a 'national essence,' defined by the moral principles it was said to represent. By reconceptualizing the nation as a spirit or an ideal, these Poles could sustain their national identity without depending upon the immediate reestablishment of the state. At the same time, they utilized the teleological historiosophies so popular in the early nineteenth century to give this nation an exalted mission of salvation for all humanity, making national resurrection both morally and historically inevitable. (Porter, 2000: 16)

Mickiewicz's work therefore created a deeper justification that the suffering and great sacrifice of the Polish people would ultimately redeem them, warranting a new age of spiritual transformation, but instilled in the people a greater sense of purpose, and strengthened those ideals that bound people together as a wider social, cultural group through a shared belief in the 'spirit' of Poland.

Słowacki, like Mickiewicz, was also concerned with the spiritual salvation of the Polish nation. Born in 1809 in modern day Ukraine, he spent his childhood in Wilno before fleeing in the Great Emigration in 1831. Considered "the most Romantic of the Romantics" (Davies, 1986: 219), Słowacki's poetry and dramatic verse is infused with melancholic, tragic, and mystical images of unrequited love and a driving desire to understand the meaning behind the sufferings of life. In his work, Słowacki devoted himself not to the individual empowerment of common man, as Mickiewicz did, but instead to the individual as an archetype, embodying the larger destinies, choices, and problems of an entire community. As Claude Backvis notes of Słowacki's archetypes: "Magnified, idealized, endowed with fantastically sharpened features which are strangely pitted against unnatural stage lighting, [his]...characters take the shape of superhistorical myth" (Milosz, 1983: 73).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For an alternative and derisive perspective on Słowacki written in Polish, see Marian Pankowski's play, *Nasz Julo czerwony* (1981), Londyn: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy. Pankowski was particularly critical of the Romantic and neo-Romantic period. For more information see the special issue devoted to his works in (2011) *Russian Literature* 70:4, ed. Dieter De Bruyn and Kris Van Heuckelom, specifically the article by

The concept of archetype proved to be influential in the later work of Grotowski, who himself staged Słowacki's work, *Kordian*, in 1962. Written in 1834, four years after the failed November Insurrection, the play used characters such as the young, over-strung Kordian to represent revolutionary attitudes within Poland. Wandering Europe in search of his life's purpose, Kordian eventually finds his cause in the revolutionary activities taking place in Warsaw. With others, he organises a plot to assassinate the Russian Tsar, the newly crowned king of Poland. However, his conspirators change their minds, leaving him alone to suffer indecision and anxiety over committing the murder. He weakens and does not kill the Tsar, but is discovered and confined in a mental institution. Declared in full control of his mental faculties, Kordian is condemned to death. Before he is killed, a stay of execution is issued, but its delivery is delayed. Leaving Kordian's fate hanging in the balance at the end of the play, Słowacki creates an archetype that depicts a strong opposition to tyranny, drawing a parallel between the unknown outcomes of Kordian's life and Poland's own fate following the shattering defeat of the 1830-1 insurrection.

In his later works, Słowacki's archetypal characters continued to encompass profound reflections of Poland's destiny. Devastated by the turbulent events in his country, paired with a fascination of mysticism and his own "hallucinatory dreams" (Milosz, 1983: 233), Słowacki came to believe that a nation held deep spirituality. He explores this concept in his poem, *King-Spirit (Król-Duch, 1847)*, in which the Polish nation is cast as the king-spirit, or the embodiment of Poland's historical monarchs. Charting the progression of civilization through the difficult decisions of these past leaders, Słowacki poses his theory that a nation must suffer pain and injustice in order for it to achieve spiritual salvation. As Walicki explains, Słowacki's conviction was defined by

an apotheosis of the ‘torture of bodies’ perfecting the spirit, an apotheosis of bloody revolutions and, even, of great crimes, devoid of any moral justification but, nevertheless, furthering mysteriously the cause of progress. ...The poet believed that the laws of progress *must* be cruel because suffering and oppression are the most effective means of mastering the energy of the spirit. (Walicki, 1982: 280)

With this philosophy driving his artistic work, Słowacki created poetry and dramatic verse that not only challenged and criticised the current state of the Polish people’s sociopolitical environment, but provided a means – through art – that allowed people to explain and justify their own suffering.

Fifty years later, Wyspiański began his work in Austrian-controlled Galicia. As a writer, painter, and playwright, Wyspiański’s aim was to create art that could reignite the revolutionary sentiments that had collapsed following the final, brutal defeat of the last major insurrection in 1863. Exhausted and demoralised, the Polish people had become disenchanted with the Romantic ideals that had failed to bring them independence. Facing even tighter controls, people began to look for ways to minimize the aggression of the occupying powers. Tri-loyalty became the new approach, which encouraged “acceptance...in each of the Partitions of the forms of private and public life prevailing in the Empire concerned” (Rose, 1941: 392). Supported by Polish politician, Roman Dmowski (1864-1939), this movement was referred to as Polish Positivism. Advising peaceful coexistence with the governing powers, Dmowski pointedly sought to work *with* the system in order to achieve change in Poland. In the Russian and Prussian controlled territories, where restrictions, censorship, and modes of assimilation had become inordinately harsh following the uprising, this seemed the only logical path in order to maintain some semblance of a peaceful existence.

In Galicia, however, conditions had begun to improve. As mentioned earlier, the waning power of the Austrian Empire in Galicia by the end of the nineteenth century began to foster new hopes of autonomy. Gradually, Poles were appointed to governmental

positions; Polish became the language of the courts, and was reintroduced into the local schools and universities; the Catholic Church was removed from strict surveillance. As a consequence, Polish culture found a space for revival. Stirred by the uncompromisingly patriotic stance of General Józef Piłsudski, a man who would later lead the autonomous Second Polish Republic between 1918 and 1939, this period in Galicia was marked by its freedom of thought, its creativity, and its strong desire for an independent, united Poland.

These ideas were manifested in Young Poland, a largely artistic movement centred in Kraków, which revived earlier Romantic principles and issued “[l]iterature as a call to national action, poetry as a criticism of social inertia and of declamatory self-delusions” (Dyboski, 1941: 543). Painters, poets, philosophers, playwrights, scholars, and musicians found they were free to travel openly, to discuss ideas, and to create. They therefore focused much of their efforts on regenerating Polish national identity in their work.

Wyspiański rose to the forefront of the Young Poland movement. Born in 1869 in Kraków, his work ranged from paintings, architectural designs, and stained glass work, to patriotic plays, poems, in addition to innovative and complex stage designs. All of this work was permeated by the rapidly expanding artistic and cultural scene in Kraków. Although he was certainly influenced by the century’s earlier Romantic period, Wyspiański was by no means a ‘Romantic’ poet. As Tony H. Lin points out:

[H]is relationship with the Romantic bards is complex, often ambivalent. On the one hand, Wyspianski revered them for tackling the question of nationhood. On the other hand, he also attacked his predecessors’ inability to unite and mobilize the masses in a joint fight against the enemy. (Lin, 2012: 59-60)

As such, Wyspiański believed strongly that art was a social, political, and “historical activity” (Brzozowski cited in Milosz, 1983: 358). To achieve this, he blended artistic forms in order to create an artistic means of social commentary. Gerard T. Kapolka notes that his plays were

theatrical spectacles which ‘form a unity of word, color, music, and movement.’ In this we see not only the influence of Wagner, but of Greek tragedy as well. The organizational principles of his dramas resemble not only those of painting...but also those of music, making use of devices such as refrains, purposefully sustaining certain moods...and varying these moods like a symphonic composition. (Kapolka, 1990: 12)

This interwoven approach to drama and performance – echoed in the later work of both Gardzienice and *Song of the Goat* – aimed specifically to confront spectators with what he believed to be a weakened and increasingly docile attitude that had been spreading throughout the territories as a result of Dmowski’s proposals of reconciliation. His work, therefore, sought to incite people into action: Polish director and theatre critic Leon Schiller (1887-1954) considered Wyspiański a continuation of the Romantic poets and “a precursor of the ‘fighting’ or political theater” (Milosz, 1983: 354) of the early to mid-twentieth century.

Laden with patriotic images and historical characters, Wyspiański’s plays took a critical perspective of the prevailing sentiments in his country. *The Wedding (Wesele)*, written and staged in 1901 – another canonical work of Polish literature staged by Osterwa and the Reduta Theatre in 1926 and brought to the screen by Andrzej Wajda in his 1972 film of the same name – tells the story of a wedding between a poet and a peasant girl.<sup>37</sup> What begins as a light-hearted portrayal of a country wedding, however, slowly transforms into something much more sinister.

As the guests become increasingly intoxicated, strange characters begin to arrive, creating a supernatural collision of worlds as the peasants and intellectuals encounter ghost-like symbols from Poland’s past. Of these appears Stanczyk, the fifteenth-century court jester of King Zygmunt the Elder; Hetman, who has been identified as Ksavery Branicki, a Polish noble who conspired against the creation of an autonomous Polish Constitution in

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<sup>37</sup> For two English translations of this play, see: Stanisław Wyspiański (1990) *The Wedding*, trans. Gerard T. Kapolka, Ann Arbor: Ardis; and (1998) *The Wedding*, trans. Noel Clark, London: Oberon Books

1791 and acted as accomplice to the Russian Empire, precipitating the Second Partition; the Black Knight, hero of the Battle of Grunwald against the Teutonic Knights in the fifteenth century; and Wernyhora, a figure whom Milosz considers “purely legendary” (Milosz, 1983: 356) and whom Davies accounts as a Ukrainian Cossack living in the eighteenth century who called “for the harmony of peoples, not for the rights of one nation” (Davies, 1986: 223).<sup>38</sup>

For Ann Komaromi, these figures “evoke the anguish of society’s ‘collective shadows’ projected onto the stage, confronting the audience like a ‘session of psychoanalysis’” (Komaromi, 2002: 190). The concluding events of the play emphasize the devastating implications of this analysis. During the wedding, Wernyhora visits the Host of the party, giving firm instructions to gather the people for an uprising that Wernyhora himself will lead. Before he departs, he leaves a golden horn with which the Host is to sound at dawn. The Host gives this horn to a young boy, telling him to rouse the people overnight.

By morning, the Host, suffering from too much drink, has forgotten Wernyhora’s visit, and the boy has lost the horn. The play ends with no revolution, no uprising, and the wedding party returns to their festivities, cast in a trance by music played by a reanimated man made of straw. As Davies comments of this play: “The political message is depressingly clear. Poles may have shared a splendid past; but [at this time] they did not possess either the means or the incentive for fresh patriotic ventures” (Davies, 1986: 233).

Wyspiański’s later play, *Akropolis* (1904), famously restaged in 1962 by Grotowski, echoes earlier themes of the Romantics. Set inside Kraków’s great Wawel Castle in the dead of night, the play unfolds as the statues and images of saints, monarchs, heroes, and

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<sup>38</sup> For detailed discussion of these figures, see Gerard T. Kapolka’s introduction in Wyspiański (1990) *The Wedding*, op. cit., pp. 11-23.



mythological beings depicted on tapestries and on the stained glass windows come alive, and meet one another. Placing these figures side by side, Wyspiański blurs realities, bringing history to confront modern day by placing “at center stage the relationship between performance and cultural memory” (McQuillen, 2009) and challenging the past with the past. At the end of the play, Christ enters in a chariot, resurrected as Apollo who brings the sun. This image signifies Poland’s ultimate redemption, and demonstrates the unifying power of the Catholic Church for the Polish people.

Fuelled by the Romantic and nationalistic surges of the period, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Wyspiański are each representatives of a strong artistic resolve that pushed the limits of artistic practice into a distinctly social realm. As such, the disastrous events in Poland’s history became

a springboard for inquiry into universal questions of liberty, human dignity, the morality of political power, the responsibilities of leadership, the existence of God, the dynamics of revolution, the role of the artist (the poet) in society, and the meaning of history. (Segel, 1994: 263)

The work of these artists therefore indicated a burgeoning understanding of art’s capability to empower a disenchanted, demoralised community, revive feelings of solidarity and belonging, and unite a people. By creating a means through which people could analyse philosophical, cultural, and spiritual questions concerning their own lives as individuals, and their collective life as a nation during the severe oppression of the partitions, artists such as Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Wyspiański contributed significantly to an understanding and approach to art that was to have a profound effect on the further development of a particularly social strand of theatre emerging from twentieth-century Poland.

## **Socially Oriented Theatre in Twentieth-Century Poland**

Changes in Poland's sociopolitical environment during the twentieth century assured prominence for this artistic exploration of identity, nationality, and community. Escalating discontent throughout Europe prior to the First World War caused the partitioning powers to become increasingly concerned with maintaining widespread control in both their annexed territories and amongst their own people. For the Poles, the situation continued to be most turbulent in the Russian-controlled territories. With the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, followed a year later by the Bloody Sunday massacre in St. Petersburg, a series of strikes, uprisings, and violent demonstrations shook the Russian Empire, simultaneously fuelling Polish claims for an autonomous nation.

Although the general discontent throughout Russia allowed for gradual concessions with regards to religion, language, and government representation in the Polish territories, the Poles were still unable to assert their independence. It was the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 that brought a surprising possibility of freedom to the Polish people. Pitting Poland's three partitioning empires against each other, the war created a situation in which "the solidarity of the partitioning powers...was broken at last" (Davies, 2005: 279). By the end of the war in 1918, all three empires had collapsed: Prussia and Austria had been defeated by the Allied Powers, while the Russian monarchy was overthrown by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. For the first time in over a century, Poland was a free nation.

Despite this significant and long-anticipated victory for the Polish people, the task of rebuilding was overwhelming. During the war, Poland had once again become the unfortunate victim of geography. With the eastern front cutting across the land throughout the war, fighting had ravaged towns, roads, and railways, and had left local industry and agriculture crippled. As J. H. Penson asserts: "What was left was so entirely inadequate, that if an immediate remedy were not found the population would be faced with starvation"

(Penson, 1941: 567). In order to prevent further disaster, the economy had to be stabilized, industry and agriculture revived, and the cities and public works rebuilt.

Beyond this, however, the Poles had an even larger task at hand: after almost a century and a half of partitions, there was no system upon which to rebuild. There was no Polish economy, or Polish industry, agriculture, or government. These vital elements of a nation had to be formulated, structured, and integrated into a new national system. Building the Polish nation also required a reformulation and reassertion of the national Polish identity – an experience the population would face again decades later, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although the people had tirelessly fought for their independence throughout the partitions, it was undeniable that their lives had been altered by over a century of foreign rule. In fact, the partitions had left the people “deeply divided by conflicting political preferences, ideological values and ethnic loyalties, as well as profound economic, social and legal disparities” (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2006: 211).

Additionally, there was still a significant portion of the population that was comprised of national minorities; from the Ukrainians and Jews to the Belarusians, Germans, Czechs, Lithuanians, and Russians, these communities began to assert their own distinct ethnic and cultural identities. The Poles were therefore “thrown into competition with the equally uncompromising nationalisms of their fellow citizens” (Davies, 2005: 300). Independence had raised a completely new set of difficult questions as to the nature of the Polish nation. While years of oppression had failed to eradicate Polish culture, instead causing the people to rally towards a common cause, newfound freedom brought uncertainty and chaos to the population.

Poland’s Second Republic, which lasted only until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, was therefore a time of immense creativity and possibility, and a time of significant hardship: the “reality of regained freedom proved very different from those

visions of the Promised Land” (Dyboski, 1941: 554) as dreamt of during the Partitions. By insisting on the need for a greater spiritual purpose, the strong demand for unity and solidarity issued during the nineteenth century demonstrated that the “Romantic heritage...went to the very heart of national self-perception and purpose” (Segel, 1994: 267).

Theatrical work in the twentieth century became anchored in this particular sociopolitical and cultural context. It is also important to note, however, that the theatrical practices in the twentieth century began to expand upon these earlier Romantic principles; no longer only issuing an urgent call to arms, artists began to turn inwards, searching for an deeper essence of humanity in which people were able to question their own beliefs and perceptions in the shared environment of performance. Over time, a particular strain of theatre in Poland developed, reexamining human identity and the profound experience that may occur when people encounter each other. Beginning with Osterwa and Limanowski’s work with Reduta, and amplified later by Grotowski, this marked the beginning of a progressive shift from the Romantic works of the nineteenth century into the investigative and experimental works of theatre as a social, transformative experience.

Established in Warsaw in 1919 by Osterwa, a highly successful stage actor, and Limanowski, a geologist and literary theatre director, Reduta was created with the intention to reestablish a sense of integrity, ethics, and social purpose in theatre and – through this – the larger society. Little has been documented of this group outside Poland. As Dariusz Kosiński notes, a large portion of the original archives were destroyed in the Second World War (Kosiński, 2009) and, while works have been published in Polish – including Osterwa’s own personal notes and letters, and a thorough account by Zbigniew Osiński entitled *The Memory of Reduta (Pamięć Reduty)* – there is a distinct lack of English-language analysis of the work. Within this, there is even less account of his controversial

views, specifically towards Jews and women, which has been mentioned previously in this study's Introduction.

Of the English material available and utilized in the present study, the short accounts which have been provided by theatre historians such as Osiński and Kazimierz Braun have been cursorily helpful. The bulk of the information presented here has been drawn from portions of translated materials from Polish texts and, more significantly, from unpublished English material provided generously by Kosiński, translator Paul Vickers, and the Centre for Performance Research's Artistic Director, Richard Gough, for the purposes of this thesis, all serve to highlight the significance of Reduta's work with regards to the further development of socially oriented practices in Poland.

Reduta, translated as both a traditional Polish masked ball, and as 'redoubt', a term referring to a temporary military defense, was formed at the beginning of the Second Republic as a close group of actors bound to the professional, artistic, and social life of the company. Understanding the group as representative of an "organic and harmoniously connected whole, reflecting the harmony of the world, a microcosm" (Kosiński, 2009a), Osterwa demanded complete commitment from every member of Reduta; in addition to training and rehearsing for up to twelve hours a day, the actors also were required to participate fully in the life of the company, handling administrative tasks, costume, prop, and set design, and chores. Reduta was intended as a theatrical community, bound by a common commitment to the artistic and social principles of the group.

In establishing these strong demands within the theatre company, Osterwa believed that the actors of Reduta would propagate healthy ideals of obligation and social responsibility in a country struggling for stability. As Ireneusz Guszpit elaborates, the theatre in this respect did not "serve the audience merely as a form of entertainment; instead, its main desire should be to 'benefit society spiritually'" (Guszpit, forthcoming).

Osterwa's earlier career as a prestigious farcical and comedic actor had left him with the impression that theatre in the newly independent Poland had forsaken its duty to society; instead, it had become overrun by pandering, frivolous, and self-indulgent plays, designs, actors, and audience members. Grotowski, who was influenced by Osterwa's work, as will be addressed shortly, relates:

He...felt such a strong repulsion for the filth of theatre, for the compromise of theatre, for the sell-out of theatre – he felt such an enormous disgust that he wanted to leave it and move toward a different perspective, where man could meet another man in the context of something that makes sense, something that has purpose, something that is pure, something one could not be ashamed of. (Osiński, 2008: 64)

As the country struggled to renew its own health and prosperity, and sought to assert itself as a strong, viable, and independent nation, Osterwa believed it was imperative that the theatre find a way to engage with society. A significant period of his work with Reduta was spent touring. Bringing theatre to remote villages throughout Poland, the company visited a total of 173 villages in 900 days between 1925-1929 (Ciechowicz, 2008: 70). Osterwa's intention was to “dispatch an artistic army” (Guszpit, 2008: 64) into the broken and struggling Polish Republic in order to raise national consciousness and inspire a strong sense of social responsibility. This practice of travelling to isolated communities was to have a profound effect on the work of Gardzienice during the 1970s and 1980s, as was Reduta's early use of outdoor spaces for rehearsals (Kosiński, 2009a). The line of influence between these two groups will become evident during the discussion of Staniewski's work in Chapter Four.

Influenced by the Romantic poets, Osterwa believed that “[p]oetry is never false – it can speak only profoundly, expressing truths incomprehensible to life. It shows the soul the Spirit” (Osterwa, forthcoming). He therefore favoured such plays as Słowacki's translation of Calderon de la Barca's *The Constant Prince* (*Książę Niezłomny*) and Wyspiański's *Liberation* (*Wyzwolenie*) and *The Wedding* (*Wesele*), making use of the powerful religious,

historical, and traditional imagery in order to reinvigorate national sentiments amongst audiences.

Additionally, Osterwa was interested in the theatre as a meaningful meeting between individuals; as Grotowski identifies in his quote cited above, ‘where man could meet another man in the context of something that makes sense, something that has purpose’.<sup>39</sup> Deeply affected by an early encounter with Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre, and Stanislavsky’s own visit to Poland in 1916 (Kosiński, 2009a), Osterwa began to construct Reduta’s training around the actors’ craft, developing exercises based on pronunciation, music, rhythm, composition, dance, and fencing (ibid.). Developing body, mind, and spirit, Reduta’s training sought to move away from the rehearsed entertainment common during the period towards a more creative, alive, and truthful practice.

Reduta therefore sought to develop “a process of revealing the truth of a character through the revelation of the actor’s own truth as a human being” (Braun, 1996: 137). Proposed by Limanowski in his 1919 book, *The Actor’s Craft* (*Sztuka aktorska*), the training focused on the ability of the actor to inhabit the space between the repetitive ‘stage’ act and the live, spontaneous act of experience.<sup>40</sup> The actor’s craft was the embodiment of paradox: recalling and reliving an experience already achieved, the actor should experience it as if for the first time, at the very moment of creation (Kosiński, 2009b). Limanowski and Osterwa understood that this was possible only through the strictest precision, particularly with text, where the actors would live the very experience the poets or authors had experienced when writing. Through this process, the actors would enter into a kind of ecstatic trance within which deep spiritual truths – of both the original

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<sup>39</sup> This statement is another indication of the gender-specific language commonly utilized by both Osterwa and Grotowski.

<sup>40</sup> Reduta’s term for this process was *przeżywanie*, or experience, which was interpreted similarly to Stanislavsky’s own use of the Russian term *perezhivanie*. According to translator Kris Salata, *perezhivanie* can be “translated as the actor’s ‘intense experience’ of an emotional identification with the character” (Osiński, 2008: 68).

text of great masters and of a living human act – could be revealed. As Kosiński points out, Limanowski claimed that he was “looking for pure souls who do not act, but live in ecstasy” (Kosiński, 2009b).

Theatre for Osterwa was a spiritual transformation. Guszpit clarifies that in this process, “the truth of the art of acting becomes [...] equal to a symbol of sacrifice, an act of redemption, which the actor achieves by liberating others through the act of experiencing before the eyes of these others who are not spectators but witnesses” (Guszpit, forthcoming). As will be demonstrated shortly, this concept was to have a deep impact on the later work of Grotowski. For Osterwa, however, this work was only the beginning of something much greater. He observes:

[W]e want to...master poetry in the same way that it developed in and through drama, so in the works of Zabłocki, Fredro, Słowacki and Wyspiański, until we finally reach the land of those who are ‘ruled by the Spirit’. We shall not make it this far – only those who follow us will do so. We can, though, show them the way. (ibid.)

Reduta’s activities were abruptly interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Following the war, Osterwa attempted to create a new Reduta, but plans failed to materialise. This being said, he never lost his commitment to the social responsibility of art. Up until his death in 1947, Osterwa believed devoutly in the power and spirituality of performance. In his own words, “God created the theatre for those for whom [the] church is not enough” (ibid.).

Forty years later, Grotowski began his own investigation into the actor’s craft. As has been indicated, Reduta’s work had a strong effect on Grotowski, who makes a point to specify that his work was “direct continuation of the basic principles of Osterwa and Reduta” (Osiński, 2008: 55). Spanning forty years, Grotowski’s body of work demonstrates a tireless search for meaningful encounters between people. Committed to the practice of performance as a form of research, he and Ludwik Flaszen established the Laboratory



Theatre as a group of actors dedicated to the physical, vocal, mental, emotional, and spiritual search for deeply embedded human truths. Despite encompassing a wide range of forms – from his early work in Opole and Wrocław between 1959-1968 to the experimental paratheatrical work of the 1970s and 1980s, and beyond, into his later work in Pontedera, which will not be discussed in this study – Grotowski anchored his work in the belief that theatre held powerful, transformative potential for actors and audiences alike.

Grotowski's work developed during another distinct and restructured sociopolitical environment in Poland. The Second World War had brought an abrupt end to Poland's Second Republic, inflicting seven long, horrific years that brought the brutal deaths of over six million Poles – an estimated third of the eighteen million deaths caused by the Nazi campaigns throughout Europe and Russia (Davies, 2005: 344). Inflicting widespread terror, sub-human conditions, starvation, disease, deportations, expulsions, mass executions, and ethnic cleansing, the war targeted the country's ethnic, cultural, religious, and other minority groups, and decimated the population.

By the time peace was declared in May 1945, the Poles found their borders radically shifted to the west, the country's remaining population dramatically homogenized, and its land under Soviet occupation. As a satellite state under the control of the USSR, Poland was once again imposed with oppressive restrictions from a foreign government. Following the war, "[p]ower passed directly and smoothly from the German Occupation Forces to the Soviet Army, from the Soviet Army directly to the Soviet-controlled Provisional Government" (Davies, 2005: 430). By 1948, Stalin was in control of the Polish People's Republic. During this time, he asserted his influence over the political, economic, and social realms of Polish life, appointing his own protégés into the Polish communist government and requiring official Soviet approval for state business. Elections were fixed in favour of approved candidates and censorship was imposed in order to dispose of

subversive, anti-socialist or anti-Soviet sentiments, which were met by swift arrests, deportations, and even death.

The regulations placed on art were no less flexible. Censorship prevented anything other than the approved, pro-Soviet ideology to be presented, ushering in a grim period of ‘socialist realism’. For the theatre, this meant being confined to its role as propaganda. All performances had to be void of any explicit, veiled, or implicit criticism against the state and instead were infused with a sense of “mandatory optimism” (Cioffi, 1999: 16). In response to this, Wajda referred to socialist realism as a “‘representation of reality not as it is, but as it ought to be’” (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2006: 290) – that is, an ideal reality as defined by the communist party. Plots, designs, themes, text, characters, and emotions had to be state-approved. As the poet Mieczysław Jastrun observes: “Pessimism and sadness were banished as bourgeois and liberal emotions. Even death could be confiscated. The editor of a literary magazine rejected a short story whose protagonist had died. ‘A positive hero cannot die’, he said” (Cioffi, 1999: 16). Any perceived criticism was condemned and quickly suppressed.

With Stalin’s death in 1953, however, the situation in Poland began to improve. By 1955, the censorship laws were “relaxed sufficiently to permit the first veiled hints of criticism” (Davies, 1986: 9) and, by the time Khrushchev publicly announced at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956 that Stalin had committed serious crimes, tensions had eased significantly. A violent workers’ strike in Poznań that same year resulted in the October appointment of Władysław Gomułka, who had been imprisoned under Stalin’s orders since 1948, as First Secretary to the Polish United Workers Party. Gomułka immediately inspired a new mood of optimism with his belief that “there were ‘many roads to Socialism’”. He rejected any slavish imitation of the Soviet model, and believed strongly that Poland’s specific traditions demanded a specifically

national brand of Communism” (Davies, 1986: 11). These combined events, referred to as ‘Polish October’, ushered in a long-needed shift in mentality for the population.

This renewed sense of optimism inspired a regeneration of Polish theatre. Artists found they had increased freedom to explore previously forbidden topics and themes, and were now able to offer sharp critiques of Polish society under Stalin’s sphere of influence. A highly active student population emerged, working determinedly to support the development of a Polish approach to communism. For these students, theatre was a call to arms. Krzysztof Miklaszewski comments that student theatre groups at this time, such as the Student Satirists’ Theatre (Studencki Teatr Satyryków) in Warsaw and Bim-Bom in Gdańsk, reacted against the years of restrictions on life and tried to make up for “all the shortcomings of the...bygone period” (Cioffi, 1999: 24) by creating uncompromisingly critical performances filled with biting satire and absurd images. Often rearranging their audiences away from the formal stage/house relationship, the groups used their newfound freedom to incite passion and active change through their performances.

The traditional theatres, however, did not embrace such exuberant change. Increased attention was paid to stage design and technology – to the drastic extent that audiences would applaud the sets, which Jan Kłossowicz noted as “bewildering in the wealth and excess of concept, colour and form” (Kumiega, 1985: 10). Additionally, a significant emphasis was placed on the strict and limiting interpretation of text. This aspect of the period’s theatrical trend followed an approach to acting at the time where “‘interpretation’ was emphasized to the detriment of ‘experience’” (ibid.: 11). Attention was placed on the director, who would formulate a specific interpretation of a text, and the actor, who would portray that interpretation to the audience. In this configuration, audiences were not given an opportunity to experience and interpret the performance for themselves.

For Grotowski, all of these elements indicated a stagnant and ‘old’ theatre. Thus, when approaching his own work, he began to operate in distinct opposition to the existing theatrical conventions. In fact, Kumiega suggests that the “strongest characteristic [of his early work] was precisely that of contradiction and defiance of existing practice” (Kumiega, 1985: 12). Influenced by Osterwa’s work in the social responsibility of actors, in addition to his ideas of a theatre community and the belief that theatre could be a deeply affecting experience, Grotowski focused his own artistic exploration on the development of the actor’s physical, mental, and emotional capacities in order to create profound encounters between people through theatre.

He began this work by deconstructing familiar canonical Polish texts such as Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve*, and Romantic archetypes such as Słowacki’s character, Kordian.<sup>41</sup> Grotowski saw text as “a sort of scalpel enabling us to open ourselves, to transcend ourselves, to find what is hidden within us and to make the act of encountering the others” (Grotowski, 1968: 57). He ruthlessly stripped away layer upon layer of text in order to uncover the fundamental, archetypal characters, symbols, images, and actions embedded within the play. He then reformulated the play’s entire structure and “altered its form with an extremism...which at the time was considered to be sacrilege” (Barba, 1999: 39).

An example of this technique is the Laboratory Theatre’s 1962 production of *Kordian*. The story, as discussed earlier, tells of Kordian, a revolutionary hero who fails to assassinate the Russian Tsar in an attempt to liberate Poland from Russian rule. Imprisoned in a mental institution, Kordian is declared sane and thus condemned to death. Grotowski identified this man as the archetypal saviour; yet, instead of honouring the sacrifice he tried

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<sup>41</sup> As noted by Filipowicz, little documentation has been provided on the influence Mickiewicz’s work had on Grotowski. For her own brief analysis into this subject, see: Halina Filipowicz (1999) ‘Performing Bodies, Performing Mickiewicz: Drama as Problem in Performance Studies’, op. cit.

to make for his country, the production highlighted the uselessness of Kordian's actions by placing the entire play in a mental hospital where Kordian's dreams of revolution become fragments of his own hallucinations.

In this performance, the audience was seated throughout the space on metal hospital beds, as the patients of this psychiatric institution climbed and crawled around them.<sup>42</sup> By removing Słowacki's play from its Romantic nineteenth-century context, Grotowski challenged the audience and the actors to confront their own perceptions of martyrdom, heroism, revolution, and conviction so that they might examine and reevaluate the values that they held to be sacred. For Grotowski, this is a process of 'apotheosis and derision', in which ideals are heightened and then destroyed. By "violating accepted stereotypes of vision, feeling and judgment", Grotowski sought to "shock" people into a deeper investigation of themselves as humans (Grotowski, 2001c: 34).

Consciously creating a disjuncture within his audience's own beliefs, Grotowski explored theatre's capacity to intensify the level of engagement between themselves and the actors. As Barba explains of Grotowski's work:

[P]erformance originates from the contact between two *ensembles*, that of the actors and that of the spectators; the director has to 'direct' both these *ensembles*, consciously moulding their interaction in order to reach an archetype, and thereby the 'collective subconscious' of the two *ensembles*, these become aware of the archetype through a dialectic of apotheosis and derision which is applied to the text. (Barba, 1999: 27)

The meaningful encounter of these two ensembles, paired with the complete destruction, reformulation, and ultimate elevation of a text's essence, aimed to lay bare the deeply embedded network of human belief and understanding.

To heighten this investigation, Grotowski stripped his theatre bare – wherein lies his concept of the 'poor theatre'. This suggests simply that if performance is a shared

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<sup>42</sup> For more details on this production, see Eugenio Barba and Simone Sanzenbach (1965) 'Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow', *Tulane Drama Review* 9:3, pp. 157; and Jennifer Kumiega (1985) *The Theatre of Grotowski*, London: Methuen, pp. 55-58.

experience between the two ‘ensembles’, of the actors on one hand and the audience on the other, all that is required in order to initiate the experience *are* the two ensembles. As Grotowski himself observes:

As far as the spectator is concerned, he is not watching a story unfold, nor is he listening to an anecdote. The audience is confronted with a human act, and he is invited to react totally, even at the moment of the performance. We do not care to assault or provoke the audience nor do we wish to do all kinds of stupid things to get a rise out of the audience. What is important is to confront the spectator and that is something quite different. One can use many stimuli to provoke, but we prefer to use only common aspects of our common experiences, polarize these aspects, and then involve the audience in such confrontations. ...Ultimately the audience must give its own answer. (Grotowski, 2001: 87)

By discarding all the unnecessary elements of performance and focusing his attention not on spectacle, technology, properties or elaborate costumes, but on the actual people involved in a performance, Grotowski sought to strengthen the relationships created between the performers and the audience. Pushing the performers themselves to shape the work through a direct engagement with the audience, performance was no longer a simple piece of entertainment or a political tool, but a holistic experience.

Accordingly, Grotowski’s theatre was a laboratory: established first as Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows and later changed to Laboratory Theatre-Institute of Research into Acting Method in 1966. Under this name, the work of the group was committed to researching a mode of performance that emphasised and investigated the full potential of the performer as a human being through highly developed and rigorous training of the body, voice, mind, emotions, and imagination. Leading his performers in exercises that demanded extreme exertion, Grotowski pushed them to the very limits of their capacities – and beyond – believing, as he notes, that “[s]ince our theatre consists only of actors and audience, we make special demands on both parties. Even though we cannot educate the audience – not systematically, at least – we can educate the actor” (Grotowski, 1968: 33).

This training did not centre on a particular ‘method’, to which he was insistently opposed, but instead focused on a fluid and individualised approach to ‘unblock’ that which prevented each actor from giving and building a complete, dialectic experience with the audience. As he specifies: “[E]very individual...must discover the cause which impedes him, hampers him, and then create the situation in which this cause can be eliminated and the process liberated” (Kumiega, 1985: 111).

Grotowski understood that these blockages were most detrimental when attempting to build a relationship: if an actor is not able to give everything, to strip away acquired behaviour and associated beliefs, to sacrifice him or herself for the act of connection with an audience, an audience cannot be expected to reach that same level. Grotowski believed that blockage “hinders...human contact” (ibid.: 113); as a result, he pushed his actors to move beyond these blockages, coming to the audience as liberated, honest, and primal human beings. He states:

If the actor, by setting himself a challenge publicly challenges others, and through excess, profanation and outrageous sacrilege reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration. If he does not exhibit his body, but annihilates it, burns it, frees it from every resistance to any psychic impulse, then he does not sell his body but sacrifices it. (Grotowski, 1968: 34)

Grotowski’s actors, then, were not simply performing, nor were they engaged in the strict textual interpretations dictated by the conventions of the time. Instead, they tapped into a deeper essence of human emotion and experience, embodying what Józef Kelera describes as a “psychic luminosity” (Osiński: 1986: 85) as they sought to sacrifice themselves onstage for the sake of a shared experience with the audience. Barba observes that Grotowski’s performers were

shamans who could reveal to the spectators the relationship between their own personal experience and the collective archetypes contained in the text. They had to be able to transform themselves under the gaze of the spectators. (Barba, 1999: 28)

Through the intense physicality and emotionality developed in their training, their strong use of archetypes, and the constant experimentation with the spatial relationship between the actors and audience, the actors created an environment for a mutual experience. By living and expressing an experience on stage, the actors invited the audience to encounter their own selves in order to reach a deeper state of self-recognition.

Grotowski's search to uncover ways through which to develop meaningful connection between people took a radical turn in 1970, when he and the Laboratory Theatre made a decision to move beyond theatre in order to investigate the essence of encounters instigated *by* theatre. As Leszek Kolankiewicz recorded, their statement was:

Examining the nature of theatre, its unique substance, and what makes it different from other artistic domains, we came to the conclusion that its essence lies in direct contact between people. This in mind, we have decided to get beyond art to reality, since it is in real life rather than on the artistic plane that such contacts are possible. (Kumiega, 1985: 156)

Through projects such as *The Mountain of Flame* (1975), they brought people together – not as actors, nor as audience members, but as equal and engaged participants – in a space, in nature, to encounter themselves and one another through meaningful, reciprocal experience. Tadeusz Burzyński noted that over the years

Grotowski's goal, which he is seeking to achieve in stages through the work of the Laboratory Theatre, ...is to find the other pole of life and theatre, that is, the place and time where human beings stop acting, 'disarm,' and throw off their masks and simply *be*. But *to be in interaction, in coexistence, with others*. (Osiński, 1986: 149-150)

Although his approach shifted, Grotowski did not abandon his search for the deeply connective powers of performance. Believing that the human encounter – two people coming into communion with one another – was the most powerful of all phenomena, Grotowski's work vitally restructured the developing understanding of performance as a social force. Insofar as it is a communion between people, theatre had the potential to



expose the deepest, psychic realities of a person, allowing them to encounter another individual with truth and honesty.

Throughout history, all of these artists – from Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Wyspiański, to Osterwa and Reduta, and Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre – represent a strong commitment to the social capacity of art. Charting close to two hundred years of occupation, suppression, discrimination, and war in Poland's past, these artists' respective practices have been shaped by the continual and demanding issues of identity and belonging that have claimed prominence during the centuries of annexation and oppression.

For so much of the Polish population, art became the only means through which people could express themselves and, because of this, it has played a consistent political and social role in Polish life. From Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Wyspiański's use of poetry and dramatic verse in order to charge society with a common sense of identity and belonging to Osterwa's developing commitment to social responsibility through theatre and Grotowski's dedication to creating a meaningful experience between people, each of these artists has based his work on social engagement. By consciously creating an active experience, people can be confronted and challenged to reassess their own defining beliefs, values, and convictions.

It is important to note that, since the fall of communism, the Romantic period of the nineteenth century has come under direct fire. In discussing the works of Romantic poets, Elżbieta Baniewicz writes:

Written as 'requiem masses' for the nation's freedom, they were topical for many decades. Under communism they reflected, at least in allusions, the division of society into 'us' and 'them,' the free and the enslaved, the opposition and the system. Today, when society has regained its status as the subject and not the object of events, these works demand reassessment. There is even talk that the Romantic paradigm that defined Polish culture so strongly until now has been exhausted" (Baniewicz, 1996: 469).

The argument is that symbols, language, and images in poems and plays by artists such as Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Wyspiański have become so aggrandized that they block attempts for modern Polish society to progress into new cultural and artistic discourses. As Baniewicz suggests here, the polemic introduced by these artists was valuable when oppression dictated so much of the Polish sociopolitical and cultural landscape. However, the issue in Poland today is how to develop an understanding of cultural and national identity within a new democratic and autonomous society.<sup>43</sup>

As will be shown in the following three chapters, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat have either emerged directly from this Polish context, as in the case of Polish groups Gardzienice and Song of the Goat, or have built upon this distinctly Polish tradition of social action through art, as with the Odin through the work of Grotowski. Representing three contemporary generations of theatre practices dedicated to the investigation of performance's role and social responsibility to society, these groups expand upon the earlier work as conceived and practiced by of Osterwa and Grotowski. Using theatre as a means to instill, invigorate, honour, and celebrate human connection, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat have created an artistic practice that searches for new ways to open connections towards the regeneration of a stronger and more vital sense of community within society today.

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<sup>43</sup> The eminent Polish scholar, Maria Janion, has been instrumental in raising this issue. Sadly, her writing has not yet been translated into English. For selected works, see: Maria Janion (1995), *op. cit.*; and (2007), *op. cit.*

### **Chapter Three: Odin Teatret**

Since 1964, Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret have devoted their performance practice to investigating and forging the social relationships that bind people together in community. Formed initially in Oslo before moving permanently to Denmark in 1966, the Odin has evolved as a performing group with a conscious awareness of the relationships that compose the group as a whole.

Drawing on Barba's early apprenticeship with Grotowski which lasted from 1962-1964, the Odin has continued to investigate the social connections that instigate meaningful encounters between audiences and the actors. The Odin, however, has extended this search beyond the theatre and into the social world, seeking to engage with artistic, social, ethnic, and cultural minorities around the world through performance in an attempt to build a wide-reaching and supportive community founded on the celebration and acceptance of diversity.

Barba and the Odin's approach to performance has been largely defined by the particular circumstances surrounding the group's initial formation. As an Italian immigrant who had travelled extensively, lived in Norway, and studied in Poland, Barba considers himself a foreigner, "[a]t home in different cultures, yet always a foreigner" (Barba, 1986: 19). This attitude has undeniably shaped Barba's own desire to promote tolerance by embracing differences through his various artistic initiatives.

A significant aspect of the Odin's history is its early struggle to practice theatre in artistically conservative conditions. Aiming to continue the experimental work he had witnessed with the Laboratory Theatre in Poland, Barba was unable to find creative and financial support from the more mainstream Norwegian theatres during the 1960s.

Recruiting amateur and largely untrained individuals who had little knowledge or experience of professional theatre, let alone the avant-garde principles Barba was attempting to employ, the group quickly formed a tight, cohesive theatre community bound together through a self-imposed and rigorous level of discipline, a total commitment to creating theatre, and strong devotion to the group itself.

Barba and the members of the Odin therefore celebrate each actor as a unique social, cultural, and physical being and have constructed an approach to performance that highlights every actors' personal experiences, talents, imagery, posture, gestures, movement, and vocalization. Within the context of the group, however, the Odin emphasizes these individual traits by bringing them into relief with others, shaping a community that, through the actors' diversity and individuality, is united by a shared commitment to and investment in the group as a whole.

In order to establish community in this sense, Barba believes that it is "necessary to look for reciprocal differentiation in order to achieve totality" (Barba, 1986: 14). This understanding of 'totality', or a mutual agreement between people, drives Barba and the Odin's entire body of work. For the members of the Odin, the life of the group is more than that of a performing group bound together through artistic principles. Instead, they approach the group as a collective of social and artistic beings who have come together through their common subscription to the ideals, values, tasks, and interlocking relationships that compose the Odin as a community.

With this in mind, Barba asserts that the performing group, as a social group, can exist as an independent and autonomous entity within the wider structure of society. He elaborates:

I began my search to overcome individual limitations, to meet the reality which was all around, to try to bring about a new way of life: a theatre group like a little island which can detach itself from the solid ground of terra firma yet remain cultivatable,

becoming strong by exploiting its weaknesses, rediscovering its own identity, its own being, through difference with others. (Barba, 1986: 19)

His metaphor of the group as an island confirms the significance Barba has assigned to the social life of the Odin, creating a performing group as a safe, protected, and almost sacred space in which each individual in his or her full capacity as a human being is nurtured, supported, and respected.

Barba's concept of the 'floating island' is a fundamental component of the group's habitus, to refer to Bourdieu's term discussed in Chapter One. By defining itself as a self-contained and self-sufficient group, the Odin has created a group identity rooted in the vehement assertion and defence of its own individuality. Working from their theatre in Holstebro, a small rural town in northwest Denmark, the Odin has therefore established a performance practice that requires the continual investment and active involvement of each member of the group. For the actors, theatre work with the Odin is an integrated part of their daily lives. Ranging from regular training, rehearsals, and performances to conducting personal research, providing work demonstrations, writing articles, organising community projects and festivals, and sharing administrative work, maintenance, and chores throughout the Odin's facilities, the actors generate and reinforce the identity of the group.

An important component of Barba's understanding of the Odin is his belief that the group maintains a distinctive group culture, which takes the form of the specific artistic and ethical principles that define the group and determine its engagement with the larger world. For Barba, culture is not limited to geographic or political definitions. He states: "There are people who live in a nation, in a culture. And there are people who live in their own bodies.... The heart of this country...is our body-in-life" (Barba, 1986: 11). Culture, according to Barba, is not exclusively attached to nationality, ethnicity, religion, or any other wider, socially defined criteria. Instead, and with specific regards to the Odin, he

understands culture to exist within an individual's physical form as a defining structure that is unique to that individual. In these terms, a group's culture can exist as any agreed upon characteristics that bind a group together and define them as unique – whether political, religious, linguistic, or artistic.

Whether or not we accept this understanding of culture, a debate that will be addressed briefly later in this chapter, the Odin defines itself as individuals bound together through a shared artistic vision. Their approach to performance has evolved as a means through which to create strong connections between people that are grounded fundamentally in mutual respect. This is evident in every aspect of the Odin's work, from the actors' training to their performances, in addition to the elaborate theoretical framework Barba has developed over the years. Including his concepts of 'theatre anthropology', 'third theatre', and 'barter', Barba has sought to unlock the performer's full capacity as a social, artistic individual, to strengthen the connections that bind groups – including the Odin – together, and to create a wider, supportive, and inclusive community for marginalized 'floating island' groups, with whom the Odin fundamentally identifies.

For Barba, connection in the theatre begins with the performer. Believing that performance rests on an actor's ability to captivate an audience, he has constructed what he calls theatre anthropology, an approach that aims to identify the necessary tools through which an actor may engage most effectively with an audience. As Barba states, theatre anthropology attempts to "trace a path between the different techniques, aesthetics, genres and specialisations that deal with stage practice" (Hastrup, 1996: 27). Drawing on techniques from around the world, including Balinese dance, Kabuki, mime, and Kathakali, Barba attempts to dissect these forms in order to uncover the essence of performance – not without contention, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Bringing together artists, scholars, students, among others, the Odin organises sessions under the name of the

International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA). Devoted to discussions, lectures, workshops, performances, and public demonstrations, ISTA's intention is to create a space in which practitioners may learn from each other and work together in an environment that promotes an interdisciplinary examination into the methods and techniques that create powerful performers.

In addition to ISTA, Barba extends his desire for a wider community through 'third theatre', a term that refers to his attempt to reach out to small and often politically, culturally, economically, or socially marginalized theatre groups around the world who, like the Odin, are devoted to creating a performance practice as a life practice. Drawing on groups based primarily in Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, and Peru, in addition to ensembles in Denmark, Poland, Italy, Mexico, and the USA (Watson, 2002: 173), Barba organises gatherings during which these groups have an opportunity to meet one another, sharing essential resources and support. 'Third theatre' aims ultimately to build "an exchange between cultures in which questions of otherness are tempered by a shared preoccupation with theatre" (ibid.: 171)

Besides theatre anthropology and 'third theatre', the most significant example of the Odin's dedication to the creation of community lies in its 'barters'. Travelling to remote corners of the world, the group seeks to trade with traditional communities, exchanging songs, dances, and any other cultural material that defines these groups as groups. From villagers in southern Italy and communities in urban areas of Paris, Montevideo, and Bahía Blanca, to indigenous tribes in the Amazonian jungle, the Odin organises barters with the intention to engage with isolated and marginalized groups. By celebrating the unique characteristics that define them as individual communities, Barba and the Odin aim to draw attention to the groups' cultural specificities, empowering these communities by strengthening the social material that binds them together.

The Odin's barters are distinctive because they are not simply exchanges with other artistic communities, as is the case with the concepts of both theatre anthropology and 'third theatre'. Instead, they are encounters between the Odin and diverse ethnic, social, economic, and cultural communities around the world. As a result, a significant aspect of the group's barters are not only that they revive the cultural material that defines the group with which the Odin engages, but in fact that they express and enhance the Odin's own identity as a group. For Barba, this can be seen as one of the primary reasons for engaging in barters. He does not claim a desire to change any community, but rather to celebrate the sociocultural elements that make it unique. While this practice raises specific concerns regarding the nature of interaction with often vulnerable minority groups, as will be addressed later, barters have proven to be a vital component of the group's work, not only further demonstrating the Odin's commitment to open acceptance of diversity, but actively reinforcing and contributing to the Odin's own self-definition as a community (Barba, 1986: 159).

The Odin's particularly social understanding of itself indicates the significance it places on its own life as a social group. Because the conditions surrounding its formation forced the Odin to define itself in such strict opposition to its environment, the group's work demonstrates an exhaustive attempt to establish a wider, inclusive network of support for both the Odin and the diverse, marginalized communities with whom it interacts. Barba and the Odin's practice has been driven by an overwhelming desire to empower themselves and justify their own existence. Searching in every aspect of their work to uncover powerful moments of connection between people, the Odin attempts to create performance as a means through which to generate recognition and acceptance of individuality through tolerance and understanding.



## The Formation of the Odin

Barba's understanding of performance stems directly from his formative experiences with Grotowski. An Italian migrant working as a sailor and welder in Norway, Barba moved to Poland with the intention to study theatre directing. He credits this decision to Wajda's 1958 film, *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiół i diament*), a fictional story that follows a soldier in the Polish underground movement during the final days of the Second World War. Barba describes that the film

hit me like a punch in the stomach and I went back to see it...three, five, maybe ten times. The images...were of a civil war, of a desperate passion, of a sense of honour and a contempt for life, of a tenderness for the madness and the weakness of human beings crushed by the ferocity of history. ...I had to go there. (Barba, 1999: 15)

Barba arrived in Warsaw in January 1961. Although the country was slowly beginning to experience improved social and economic conditions, Poland was still recovering from both the destruction of the Second World War and the severe social, political, and economic conditions under Stalin, whose regime had collapsed five years before with Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, as discussed in the previous chapter. Newly arrived in Poland, Barba was excited by the country, noting that he was "intrigued by the vitality of these people" (ibid.: 18).

Not long after his arrival, however, Barba became disenchanted. He comments:

In this society which defined itself as socialist, my left-wing ideas collided with endless examples of injustice, abuse of power, bureaucracy, indifference and cynicism. My ingenuousness vanished, and in its place I felt acquiescence and apathy... All my theories, both political and theatrical, dissolved (ibid.: 22).

It was at this point that he encountered Grotowski's work for the first time. After visiting the Theatre of the 13 Rows in Opole for a performance of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, a performance he admittedly found uninspiring (ibid.: 20), the two gradually became friends. Discussing art, politics, religion, history, and philosophy late into the night, these meetings had a profound effect on Barba.

Prior to his time in Poland, Barba had believed that performance held a great capacity to stimulate an audiences' emotions, imaginations, and minds, but he had been unable to find theatre that explored this potential fully. As he explains: "I searched in theatre for that disorientation which...made me feel alive, for that sudden dilation of my senses. In vain. ...Until I arrived in Opole, Poland" (Barba, 1995: 81). Grotowski's ideas of theatre "turned [him] upside down" (Barba, 1999: 92). By January 1962, Barba had abandoned his course in theatre directing and had moved to Opole, where he worked as Grotowski's apprentice until 1964.

At this time, Grotowski and Flaszen's theatre had only been in operation for three years. Observing and meticulously recording everything from training, rehearsals, private conversations, set designs, and performances, Barba was witness to the developing work of the Laboratory Theatre as Grotowski himself was beginning his own journey. Throughout his apprenticeship, Barba maintained close contact with the director, "making comments, expressing doubts, asking for explanations, making suggestions, opening up for all...associations, impressions and questions" (ibid.: 92), and assumed the role of Assistant Director for the Laboratory Theatre's 1962 production, *Akropolis* and again for the 1963 *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (*Tragiczne dzieje Doktora Fausta*).

Barba readily acknowledges Grotowski as his master (ibid.: 13), making a point, however to assert that

Grotowski revealed *my* values to me, he did not impose *his* values. It is a stroke of luck to meet someone who makes you aware that you have hidden possibilities within you, and helps you to bring them to life through demands and trials. (Barba, 2007: 102)

Through Grotowski's work, Barba came to understand the significance of developing the physical, mental, and emotional capacities of the performer; as he points out, he "absorbed the conviction that the theatre is a flame needing wood – the body and soul of the actor – in

order to burn” (Barba, 1999: 36). Additionally, he saw that, once the body, voice, mind, emotions, and imagination was trained, an actor had the potential to build relationships of immense power with an audience. Barba describes this experience, noting that a “flame sprang from the actor, illuminating a hidden part of me. ...holding my hand and helping me to overcome my hesitations and fears” (ibid.: 36). This deep moment of connection between an actor and the audience had a profound effect on Barba and was to become an essential element of his later work with the Odin.

Besides his observations of the training and rehearsals, Barba’s primary task in Opole was to stimulate interest in Grotowski’s work in the West. He conducted interviews with Grotowski and wrote his own articles, which he published in Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, and the United States.<sup>44</sup> He organized meetings throughout Europe with critics, authors, editors, and any other interested parties, and attended a number of theatre conferences in order to promote the Laboratory Theatre. At the 1963 International Theatre Institute (ITI) Congress in Warsaw, Barba persuaded a group of prominent practitioners and critics to travel two hours by bus to Łódź, where the actors were performing *Doctor Faustus* – an event which proved to be decisive in raising awareness of Grotowski’s work outside of Poland (Barba, 1999: 71-74).

In 1964, the Laboratory Theatre produced *A Study of Hamlet (Studium o Hamlecie)*, drawing from both Wyspiański’s text of the same name and on Shakespeare’s play. Presented only twenty times as a work-in-progress, the production was an exploration of the individual, represented by Hamlet, and his struggle against the power, actions, and desires of the masses, with references made in the performance to the Polish ‘Populace’ (Kumiega, 1985: 72-74). Barba’s description of the performance notes its explicit and

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<sup>44</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography of Barba’s writings, see Odin Teatret’s website at: <http://www.odinteatret.dk/media/217063/A-BIBLIO-EB-%20ago%2010.pdf>

gratuitous violence, aggression, and brutality (Barba, 1999: 77-82). As a result, he comments that the performance was “a slap in the face for everyone, friends and enemies alike; it escaped the comprehension and the sensitivity of the Teatr-Laboratorium 13 Rzędów’s supporters and shook the criteria and the norms of Polish socialism” (ibid.: 81).

With the theatre facing closure from the Polish authorities at this time, Barba travelled to Paris, Copenhagen, and Oslo in order to obtain international leverage that could keep the Laboratory Theatre in operation. The theatre’s future was eventually secured by Grotowski’s own connections in the Polish Ministry of Culture. Barba, however, was denied reentry into Poland after this trip abroad on the grounds of being a “*persona non grata*” (ibid.: 85). He therefore returned to Norway, unable to continue his work with Grotowski.

In Oslo, Barba discovered that his profound experience in Poland carried little weight among Norwegian theatres. Because he had not completed his theatre degree in Warsaw, Barba had no theatre credentials other than this apprenticeship, which not only had been undertaken with a still virtually unknown Polish director, but consisted of avant-garde and experimental artistic techniques that were in no way understood or accepted at the time. To further complicate matters, Barba was an Italian immigrant who spoke little Norwegian and had been living behind the Iron Curtain for three years. For all of these reasons, his situation was utterly foreign, and even suspicious, to the theatre world in Oslo. This made it impossible for Barba to find employment in any established theatres.

However, he was determined to continue with the training and techniques he had witnessed in Poland. Barba therefore decided to form his own group dedicated to “an artistic revolution” (Barba, 1999: 90) that would investigate alternative means through which to create performance. None of the professional actors Barba approached in Oslo had been exposed to intense, visceral training such as he had encountered in Poland. As a result,

he describes that most of those he spoke with were simply not “prepared to abandon the gratification and pleasure of the amateur for the discipline of the ‘psycho-dynamic’ theatre” (Barba, 1999: 90).

Targeting young people who had been rejected from the acting school in Oslo, Barba eventually gathered together enough people for an initial meeting. Torgeir Wethal, a founding and current member of the Odin, describes that this meeting with Barba included an explanation of Meyerhold’s bio-mechanics, a description of Indian Kathakali dance, photos of Grotowski’s *Doctor Faustus*, and elements from the intense physical training of the actors in the Laboratory Theatre. Wethal explains:

I can’t imagine that I had understood anything. Anything other than that it had something to do with the theatre. And that I wanted to do theatre was one of the things that I was very sure about. (Christoffersen, 1993: 42)

Wethal was one of eleven people who arrived on 1 October 1964 for the first meeting of the Odin. Starting with basic improvisations and rigorous physical exercises from sports and various forms of dance, the training this group began in Oslo was so unfamiliar to the participants that actor Else Marie Laukvik comments that within “five or six days, there were only six [people] left, and after four weeks...five” (ibid.: 29).

From the very beginning, the group existed entirely outside the social norms. Barba refers to the Odin as “a group of misfits” (Barba, 1986: 205) struggling to survive beyond the network of established theatres, finding little support, no recognition, and fighting to legitimize itself as a performing group. These conditions had a profound effect on the way in which the members of the Odin understood and defined themselves as a group. Shaped by their own exclusion from the accepted theatre world, the actors of the Odin developed quickly into a performing group rooted in defiant self-reliance, turning to themselves for not only the resources, but the support necessary to survive.

At the beginning, the group trained and rehearsed in any available space – even spending a significant portion of its first year in an air raid shelter, where it held its final rehearsals for its first performance, *Ornitofilene* (1965) (Christoffersen, 1993: 30). In 1966, two years after its formation, their financial situation in Oslo forced the Odin to relocate to Holstebro in rural northwestern Denmark, where the local town council offered the group subsidies and their own space in exchange for becoming the town's resident theatre company.

Although this move offered respite from the financial strains, it caused other challenges for the group. The Odin lost three members and so was composed only of Wethal, Laukvik, and Barba after the move. Additionally, the actors found themselves in a foreign country, communicating through the few shared words between Norwegian and Danish, and living “far from big cities, far from the critics and the theatre-going public” (Barba, 1986: 203). However, the members of the Odin now had their own theatre on a large plot of farm land on the outskirts of Holstebro in which they could live and work, and where they could devote themselves fully to their training and research, and recruit new members with whom to further build the group.

This situation naturally drove the members into further isolation and dependence upon each other, and also gave rise to specific requirements for their work. Barba comments:

All the actor's work, his training, his personal research, took place isolated from any extraneous observation. Our two work rooms in Holstebro were separate ('secret', etymologically speaking) environments in which the actor's research could develop protected from external disturbances, in reciprocal trust, without being subjected to the tyranny of premature judgments and the haste to produce. (Barba, 1986: 12)

Finding themselves isolated not only artistically and culturally, but geographically, the actors had no choice but to refer to their own resources and talents.

Over time, the Odin's facilities grew around the actors.<sup>45</sup> Devoting their time equally to their regular training, rehearsals, and performances, in addition to conducting their own research into diverse techniques, writing articles, working on the Odin's own journal, *Teatrets Teori og Teknikk*, published between 1965-1974, assisting with administrative tasks such as publicity and tours, the actors' workspace became a living space. Living on or nearby to the theatre's grounds, the actors' daily lives *were* the theatre: from costume-making to working individually on complicated scenes, planning and cooking evening meals for the group, or going out for a quick bicycle trip to a neighbouring forest, the Odin created, as Ian Watson points out, an environment that fostered "a way of life rather than a mere profession" (Watson, 1993: 31).

Barba specifies that it is the relationships within the group itself that define theatre for the Odin. He asserts: "For us from Odin Teatret, the theatre is this reciprocal presence. It is the relationship we establish between us. Not theories, not methods – just this relationship" (Barba, 1986: 183). By relying fundamentally on the bonds that hold them together, the members of the Odin have created a performing group that is a cohesive community, which adheres not only their own method of training and unique approach to theatre, but their very own "social function" (ibid.: 203).

Located on the edge of Holstebro and surrounded by fields and forests, the Odin's buildings today house not only theatrical spaces such as rehearsal and performance rooms, set construction workshops, private dressing rooms, offices, a music room, and a training space, but also two fully-equipped kitchens, an expansive dining and conference area, sleeping quarters, a research room, a video archive, and a library. Every member of the

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<sup>45</sup> Details regarding the Odin, in addition to later details regarding the performance of *Don Giovanni all' Inferno* are based on fieldwork conducted between May and June 2006 in Holstebro.

group, including any visitors, is responsible for the maintenance, operations, and cleanliness of the space, which Barba examines meticulously once a week.

Believing that the group must respect its space in order to respect itself as a group, Barba refers to the Odin as “our little society” (Barba, 1986: 44), where each individual is invested fully in every aspect of the group’s life, thereby assuming direct responsibility for the well-being of the group, in addition to constantly reinforcing the internal structure of the group itself. He states:

The first social phase of theatre takes place internally: it is the way in which different individuals regulate their working relationships and socialize their own needs. The character of this first socialization determines the theatre group's place and influence in society. (ibid.: 198-199)

This concept of ‘first socialization’ indicates the weight Barba places on the internal dynamics of the Odin. Echoing Bourdieu’s own discussion of the habitus, Barba describes that the life of the group as a whole, including its particular characteristics and relationships that define it as a group, directly shapes the way in which that group functions in the larger world.

As mentioned previously, an important aspect of the Odin’s self-definition is Barba’s concept of the ‘floating island’, in which the group is both a part of the larger world while remaining removed from any fixed social norms or behaviour outside of their own. Putting the concept of the performing group as a floating island into practice has allowed the Odin to maintain its place on the margins of society. Existing as a component of the world, but still individual and unique, the Odin has embraced the initial conditions that forced its members to intensify their own sense of ‘group’. Barba and the Odin have therefore transformed the “discrimination” (Barba, 1986: 203) they faced in their earliest years into a fixed component of the group’s habitus. Through a conscious shift in their self-



understanding, the Odin has come to *own* the definition imposed on it by others, protecting and perpetuating this sense of self both diligently and defiantly.

### **Training and Performance**

Because the group lacked financial and creative support from cultural and artistic organisations in Norway, the Odin's training evolved from the skills, interests, and abilities of the actors themselves. Barba and the actors were "forced to be autodidacts", relying only the resources they could provide for each other. He continues, explaining that the actors "had to succeed in living this situation not as an impairment. We had to find a way of not yielding to the...handicaps that irremediably prohibited us from doing a kind of theatre that, in those years, was recognized and accepted" (Barba, 1986: 203).

This, however, proved extremely difficult as not one member of the group had any consistent theatrical training. Besides a few university courses and his apprenticeship with Grotowski's work, Barba had no practical experience in creating theatre. The situation was the same for the individual actors; each one came with a varied, yet incomplete, theatre education that included some experience in dance for one, gymnastics for another, pantomime for yet another (Watson, 1993: 43) and, in Wethal's case, years of local amateur acting (Christoffersen, 1993: 41). With very little formal training and few skills in common, the actors found they had to construct their own approach to performance using the diverse experiences they did have.

Barba and the members of the Odin therefore began to formulate their own verbal and physical theatrical language – a shared sign system that would allow them to establish their own unique vision for the theatre. Drawing on a range of exercises from gymnastics, acrobatics, dance, and yoga, the actors experimented with different patterns and techniques of movement. Each actor was encouraged to explore his or her own personal strengths and

talents, eventually specializing in one technique or another so that he or she could instruct the others. Wethal, for instance, dedicated himself to acrobatics, becoming “an expert in the group’s physical work, [teaching] most of the acrobatic and muscle control exercises” (Watson, 1993: 45). First leading the actors in individual rolls and flips, Wethal would develop these into an entire sequence composed of both front and back flips, twists, somersaults, and head and hand stands which he taught to the group precisely.

Imitation and mimicking only went so far as to build a shared physical vocabulary. Once these exercises had been learnt, the group noticed that even though each member could execute the various exercises with accuracy, every individual performed the movements in an idiosyncratic manner. Referring to one of Wethal’s acrobatic sequences, actor Iben Nagel Rasmussen describes:

We learned the exercises and put them together. The chain was to be motivated with a personal story, personal images. We showed the work one at a time. [...] We saw how each person's chain was different from that of the others, even though the exercises were exactly the same, and how the whole sequence became a kind of training poem, where rhythm and energy were modulated following dramatic principles. (Christoffersen, 1993: 52)

By shaping the same sequence of actions around their own individual line of thought, the actors saw how each person’s body, movement, rhythm, and posture differed. From their shared foundation of physical and vocal exercises, each actor began to train individually in order to experiment with and explore his or her own natural patterns of movement and sources of energy. The original sequences the actors had learned from Wethal therefore began to shift as the actors began to shape the exercises through their own physicality, motivations, emotions, and imagery.

As the training evolved, the performers began to include fragments from other performance techniques such as Kathakali, a highly codified and elaborate Indian dance form that involves extreme precision, bent wrists, a controlled spread of the fingers, and

detailed foot work. These techniques were integrated with the actors' own training, creating a unique blend of gestures, sounds, and actions for each individual. Actor Roberta Carreri observes:

The training allows me to develop my physical intelligence, my body memory. [...] This means that when I do something, whether I recognize it or not, it has to do with my training and what inspired the training. But I am doing it as an Italian woman who lives in Denmark and is a member of the Odin Teatret. [...] Everything I have learned is chewed and digested, it has gone into my blood...my body through experience, and it comes out like Roberta. (Hastrup, 1996: 111)

By investigating their own personal approaches to diverse techniques, the members of the Odin have developed an approach to performance that enhanced their own unique abilities and strengths as performers. Barba suggests that this process allows for every member of the Odin to follow his or her own path as an artist: "In this 'room of one's own', each actor can do what she or he wants, follow childish or obsessive guidelines and ideas" (Barba, 2007: 105).

From this training, the actors work slowly towards creating improvisations, incorporating their training, from acrobatics, turns, and dance steps to songs and sounds, with their own personal imagery and stories. In the filmed work demonstration *Traces in the Snow* (1994), Carreri demonstrates her very first improvisation with the Odin: a girl walks, picks a flower, and smells it. Her movements are simple, linear, and express her story clearly. She then repeats the improvisation, demonstrating the shifts that occurred after training with the Odin: she walks lightly, stops suddenly, widens her eyes, and rolls them back and forth, her body frozen. She reaches down to the ground slowly, lifts her hand to her face and, after a brief moment, begins to throw her hands in front of her face frantically. Leaping from side to side in fright, this movement transforms into a gleeful dance.

As Carreri explains, she has entered a garden where she is not allowed, picked a flower, and been attacked by bees. By expanding her original narrative and integrating it with her training in Kathakali, as seen through the exaggerated eye movements, Carreri has created an abstract series of actions that express strong images and a sense of narrative progression without committing to any particular interpretation. An important component of these improvisations is that the members of the Odin find honest movements, sounds, and gestures that do not necessarily depict reality, but retain a quality that remains true to each actor.<sup>46</sup>

Julia Varley explains this process in her filmed work demonstration, *The Dead Brother* (1994), stating that the goal of the Odin performer is to alter the everyday movements of the body while still portraying aspects of that movement in dramatic form. To demonstrate this way of working, Varley discusses an improvisation she has built from a poem, referring to some of the private images that led her to the sequence. As she elaborates, her work began with an image of daydreaming, which she started to explore by finding sleeping positions while sitting in a chair: her body slumped down in the chair, head against her chest; head back and legs stretched out; and finally, sprawled on the floor with her back against the chair, which moves suddenly, startling her. Varley then removes the chair from the improvisation and performs the movements while standing, leaning into the air with her head drooping, spread out on the floor, reacting to a slipping chair that isn't there. The actions still retain the 'real' quality of sleep, and yet are not 'realistic'.

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<sup>46</sup> For more information regarding Carreri's own views towards her training with the Odin – and, particularly, her relationship with cross-cultural performance practices – see Claudia Tatinge Nascimento's interview with Roberta Carreri in: (2009) *Crossing Cultural Borders Through the Actor's Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge*, Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies Vol. 9, New York: Routledge.

By varying the rhythm, strength, size, and placement of the movements – from using her whole body to completing the series with only her eyes or a single foot – the sequence has the possibility of expanding into something quite different beyond a simple enactment of actions as indicated by the words in a poem. Individual perceptions and interpretation are of fundamental importance to the Odin's work. To refer again to Carreri:

I am not playing a character. I am giving a name to myself on stage, and this is very different. In *Judith* you could have called me Lady Macbeth, you could have called me Salome, Magdalena, whatever. And, provided you do not listen to the text which provides a context for the character, you can see *Judith* and justify anyone [sic] of those choices. [...] I call my one woman piece *Judith*, but most of the materials in it were not created with the thought that I want to behave as Judith would have behaved. It comes from other pictures. Eugenio [Barba] never gives a theme for an improvisation which has something to do with the scene that he is working on, otherwise the temptation to illustrate the story is too great for the actor. (Hastrup, 1996: 112)

The group therefore devotes much of its energy to each individual's personal imagery and narratives within the company's work as an ensemble. Varley, Carreri, and Rasmussen have each been with the Odin for upwards of thirty years (Watson, 1993: 7-9). During this time, each of these actors has developed a dedicated practice seeking to explore her own body and its unique, pronounced manner of movement and expression. Varley's movements are expressed in a light, fluid manner, simple and drawn; her strength lying in her breathy, high, and ululating voice. Carreri, on the other hand, commands confident and athletic movements as she dances, crouches, jumps, and hangs from pieces of set, while Rasmussen masters the expressive tension held in her frame and in the visceral force behind her vocals.

The group's resultant approach has evolved as a unique combination of elements that attempt to free the performers from any restrictions that may dictate any one, 'correct' way of performing. Because these explorations reach deep into each actor's internal life, accessing their idiosyncratic ways of movement, sound, and imagery, the Odin has

consciously created an environment built on trust and respect for these differences. The group as a whole encompasses a wide-range of skills and styles. However, because most of the actors have worked together for so many years, their individual practices within the structure of the group maintain a surprising sense of cohesion.

The Odin's performances refer strongly to this paradox between individuality and unity, combining strange and oddly disjunctive symbols, sounds, and gestures that contribute to the abstract, magical, and somehow detached worlds the group creates. In their 2006 production, *Don Giovanni all' Inferno*, the Odin reworked its earlier production, *Mythos* (1998) to create a story based on Mozart's 1787 opera. In the Odin's version, the actors create an eerie underwater hell, where a conniving Don Giovanni, played by Wethal in a circus master's blue sequined blazer, obsesses over the beautifully carved and decorated wooden hands of his lovers. He collects these in a suitcase, which he entrusts to his faithful servant, Leporello (Kai Bredtholt), who accompanies the action on his accordion. Over the course of the performance, Don Giovanni is wooed unsuccessfully by a flirting female gorilla (Mia Theil Have) and haunted by the ghosts of his past lovers (Varley, Carreri, and Rasmussen), who whirl, twirl, and moan around him tauntingly.

Every action, sound, gesture, and word in an Odin performance hints at – but never commits to – some kind of profound meaning. With extravagant costumes using fine lace, pink tutus, antlers, leather, a wide array of hats, and props that have included oars, a pitchfork, unbound doors, lemons, rocks, and swords, the group's performances are rich in unattached symbolism. Interweaving these images with strange combinations of both real and fabricated languages (Watson, 1993: 3) and highly embellished, acrobatic, and abstract movements, the performances are curious, indicating firm opinions, comments, or narratives that are never clearly revealed.

Another example of the Odin's unique stylistic approach can be seen in their production of *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus* (1985). Bringing together Antigone with Joan of Arc, the Golem, the seventeenth-century kabbalist Sabbatai Zevi, the Grand Inquisitor Jehuda, and an Hassidic Jewish tailor named Zusha Malak, the Odin builds a dark world through a rich collection of culturally diverse styles and religious imagery. In the filmed version of this work, entitled *In the Beginning was the Idea* (1991), the performance space is a narrow wooden plank enclosed by draping red velvet curtains. The characters are covered in golden bangles, feather headdresses, helmets, white lace, and boas, embodying distinctive styles that do not match with the others, and yet somehow blend together because of their diversity.

The production is in Yiddish, Coptic, and ancient Greek. Words are layered with pointed inflections, wails, growls, and shrieks, all of which is enhanced by haunting choral music sung by cast members hidden behind curtains. Laukvik, as the Jewish tailor, cuts a life-sized body out of paper that, by the end of the production, has been stuffed, clothed, and laid out by a ceremonial altar decorated with candles and a silver goblet. Antigone, played by Carreri, gives birth to a baby made of bread, which is later taken by Tage Larsen's grinning character who seems to represent Death – in white face and darkened lips, sunglasses, a pirate hat, hair extensions, and red gloves – who stabs the baby, feeding pieces off the end of his dagger to Joan of Arc and Sabbatai Zevi. Death sucks water from a boulder onstage and is eventually lifted above the platform to form the pinnacle of a triangle against the red curtains, with Joan of Arc and Sabbatai Zevi to his respective left and right. The performance ends with Carreri buried up to her neck in soil, singing loudly and desperately as the characters clear the stage and the camera pans out on the props left behind: the boulder, two sets of swords – each sticking into the ground to form two triangles, the tailor and paper man's altar, and a curled antler.

With no logical narrative or even a recognisable language, audience members are forced to search for meaning from the symbols, sounds, and actions that the actors provide. Occasionally, a symbol will indicate something familiar, such as the image of the Holy Trinity that Death, Joan of Arc, and Sabbatai Zevi form, but concrete explanations are never offered or confirmed by the group. In their production, *Don Giovanni all' Inferno*, Have's gorilla character was a contentious issue during rehearsals. Academics and students witnessing the rehearsals were puzzled as to this character's significance to the story. When Barba was questioned about this, he simply shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and replied, "What do you think?"

Because of the elaborate symbolism contained in both the aesthetics of each production and in the actors' own physicality developed in their training, the Odin purposely leaves the space in which the audience may speculate, reflect, and interpret for themselves. Suggesting that theatre is "an empty and ineffective ritual which we fill with our 'why,' with our personal necessity" (Barba, 1995: 85), Barba places significance on giving the audience an opportunity to form their own opinions and interpretations, just as the performers maintain their own individual understanding of that which they are performing.

Erik Exe Christoffersen comments that the Odin's work is grounded in an understanding that "the theatre creates a meeting between human beings on a human scale: based on a direct relationship in a room where a limited number of spectators must be able to see, hear and feel" (Christoffersen, 1993: xiv). Extending this autonomy into the performance space itself, the members of the group avoid formal stages, preferring to perform most often on the ground level of multi-purposed spaces. Arranging the audience in one of two formations for the performances – either entirely surrounding the performance space or facing each other on either side of the space – the members of the



Odin invite the audience into the process of interpreting, understanding, and experiencing a performance.

### **The Culture of the Odin**

Barba's understanding of the engagement between the actors and an audience is rooted in his belief that the Odin, as a dedicated group of individuals working towards the perpetuation of the group as a whole, enters an interaction as a distinct social group that maintains its own unique group 'culture'. He asserts: "'Group culture' is...a way of saying that a group has knowledge and experience in common, has developed its own training, has found its own artistic vision and chosen its objectives" (Barba, 1986: 13). Christoffersen expands on this belief, suggesting that the very elements that compose the Odin *as* the Odin create "a way of thinking, a way of reacting, a way of seeing and perceiving the world, a way of being-in-the-world" (Christoffersen, 1993: 2).

These proposals suggest that the Odin, as a performing group founded on artistic principles and on its strong focus on social relationships, maintains its own particular world view. Examining the dynamics of society, Durkheim observes that the "totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life" (Durkheim, 1964: 79). In other words, a group of individuals, maintaining a shared language of common ideals, goals, attitudes, and perceptions, creates a distinct way of life.

For Olmsted and Hare, these "common meanings, the definitions of the situation, the norms of belief and behavior...make up the culture of the group" (Olmsted and Hare, 1978: 84). In light of this definition, culture can be seen as part of a larger structure that incorporates into itself the internal organisation of a group, determining the way that group operates in society. It must be noted, however, that the characteristics that define the Odin

as a group, which contribute to what Barba regards as the group's unique culture, are founded on very particular principles.

Shevtsova observes in her account of the group's professed cultural ideals: "The Odin group...is defined by aesthetics. Its culture, in consequence, is principally and fundamentally a theatre culture rather than a culture defined by ethno-social grouping" (Shevtsova, 2002: 116). By identifying the Odin as a group defined through its artistic work, Shevtsova makes a significant distinction between the aesthetic characteristics that have shaped the Odin, on the one hand, and the ethnic and social characteristics that define groups such as nations, ethnic, or religious minorities, and tribes.

This argument has weight: the Odin is most certainly not a nation, nor is it a group defined or shaped by a tradition of social, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or economic history and cultural patterns. Categorically, the Odin is an artistic group, defined through its members' shared approach to theatre training, in addition to their common vision for the practice of theatre and the performance work that the members produce together. However, as a social group maintaining a strong sense of identity, it is still possible to understand the Odin as a social group bound through common cause, commitment, and investment. To refer again to Durkheim:

Not only are all the members of the group individually attracted to one another because they resemble one another, but also because they are joined to what is the condition of existence of this collective type; that is to say, to the society that they form by their union. Not only do the citizens love each other and seek each other out in preference to strangers, but they love their country. They will it as they will themselves, hold to it durably and for prosperity because, without it, a great part of their psychic lives would function poorly. (Durkheim, 1964: 105)

This explanation of the social nature of a group resonates strongly with the Odin.

Understanding themselves as a 'floating island', the members of the group pay close attention to the activities, tasks, and relationships that comprise and contribute to the development of the group. While the group can certainly not be designated as an 'ethno-

social' group, Barba's particularly social understanding of the Odin reveals his own conviction of group's social function as a performing group – a fact that is vital in understanding the way this performing group has developed its own identity and its ensuing practice.

The members of the Odin have devoted themselves so fully to the group, that its defining ideals, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs have become the way in which they understand their own place in the world. Wethal observes: "For me, Odin Teatret has always been a specific point of reference from which to relate to the outside world" (Christoffersen, 1993: 42). Through their active and dedicated participation in the life of the group, the actors constantly reinforce the group's own structure and therefore their own place within it. As Watson points out, the Odin has never been just "a company [the members] work for, they are the Odin, so what they do defines both it and them" (Watson, 1993: 31).

To refer to Bourdieu and Goldmann's theories as presented in the first chapter, the Odin's own projected habitus and world view inevitably shape the way in which the group has constructed its practice. Barba himself recognises this dialectic relationship between a group's internal and external function. Writing of Odin's development, he states:

First the group laid the solid foundations of its internal and external life. Then it constructed activities on these foundations which broke through the confines of the theatre.... It is only because we concentrated on the conditions of our work for ten years and succeeded in changing ourselves before considering changing theatre or society that today we are more or less able to free ourselves from the ties of a specialized type of theatrical organization. (Barba, 1986: 14)

Acknowledging the importance in constructing the group's dynamics *before* setting out to establish connections with others, Barba indicates his belief that the internal composition of the group has great effects on the way in which the group builds relationships. As a result, the internal dynamics within a performing group alter the members' connection with an

audience and determine the ways in which that performing group may attempt to reach that audience.

### **Theatre Anthropology, ‘Third Theatre’, and Barba**

Drawing on his experience with Grotowski, Barba believes that the essence of theatre lies in the powerful moment of revelation and inspiration that develops when people connect with one another. For Barba, this connection is created both through the physical body of the actor and through his or her full capacity as a social being.

Under the name of the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, the Odin has established itself, like Grotowski’s theatre – and each one of the companies discussed in this study – as a laboratory theatre, seeking to train each performer not only as an actor, but as an independent physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and social being. Creating active links between practitioners and academics in order to promote education, research, and collaboration, Barba attempts to explore the actor’s function not only as an individual member of his or her immediate social, ethnic, religious, political, or cultural group, but as an integrated component of a much larger social structure.

Within the context of performance, the complex web of relationships is naturally dialectic: as the performing group creates, the audience experiences, interprets, and responds, actively contributing to the process of interaction. Despite the two groups’ constant exchange of signs, Barba maintains that it is the audience’s immediate response to a performer that initiates dialogue. For Barba, then, connection begins with the performer’s ability to captivate an audience. An audience must be immediately “attracted by an elementary energy which seduces without mediation, even before he has deciphered the individual actions or questioned himself about their meaning and understood it” (Barba, 1985: 369).

While often minimal or understated, this arresting moment can be profound. For example, in the 1998 filmed version of *Kaosmos* – a performance depicting life as a long journey towards inevitable death – the actors dance and sing in bursts of energy as they carry a door and frame around the stage. In the middle of this exuberance, Rasmussen sits on the floor in the centre, pulls a book off of the travelling door, and begins to read. Turning the pages one by one, Rasmussen’s concentration, agility, and vocal command keep smooth focus. Although she is not engaged in any of the wild action or dialogue surrounding her, her careful movements as she turns a page, encounters another performer, or looks directly at the audience, pull the audience in and centre the action. Rasmussen’s fluidity and skill as a performer intensify the level of engagement between herself and the audience.

Moments such as these are vital for Barba. Because he understands performance as a series of interwoven relationships, theatre begins with the performer’s ability to reach this level of communication with an audience. He explains these powerful connections as

the moment of truth, when the actor confronts the public, only if his presence seizes us and hurls us into lucid reflection, into an experience different from the quotidian, only then does *the theatre exist because the actor exists*. (Barba, 1988: 292)

For Barba and the Odin, this search for the ‘moment of truth’ has developed into an actor training dedicated to uncovering the mechanics of how powerful performers engage with an audience. This has developed into what the group refers to as ‘theatre anthropology’, which, most simply, can be described as “the study of human behavior on a biological and socio-cultural level in a performance situation” (Barba, 1986: 115). It seeks to identify the basic principles of performance in order to learn how a performer performs. In this way, it is not the study of a performance technique, but rather an investigation into “*the technique of techniques*” (Barba, 1995: 10). In other words, it is an investigation of the underlying elements that capture and express an actor’s presence in performance.

This exploration begins as Barba guides the members of the Odin in a particular method of unblocking, where they attempt to rid themselves of their acquired manners of movement, gestures, posture, inflection, and so on. For Barba, these learned behaviours are our ‘daily’ techniques, which develop from “the largely unconscious process through which our bodies and voices absorb and reflect the culture in which we live” (Watson, 1993: 32).

An important component of the Odin’s training is for the actors to learn to free themselves from daily modes of behaviour in order to adopt an expressive *performance* technique that necessitates an actor’s strong command of his or her body in an entirely different state of being. By deconstructing this ‘daily’ mode of movement, speech, and gesture, the Odin’s performers aim to access something much more personal in order to build an ‘extra-daily’, or a visceral performance technique, for their actions onstage.

To further explain this transformative process, Rasmussen again serves as an example. In an early scene from *Don Giovanni all’ Inferno*, she contracts her wrists in the most precise movements, holding and distorting her fingers with complete and focused control. She throws words from her mouth in a piercing, shrill stream, before dropping her voice abruptly into a horrific, guttural growl. Drawing on her training in Kathakali, the techniques Rasmussen employs – in addition to the range and quality of her vocalisations and movements – have been developed through years of her own personalized, devised training. Her actions onstage were entirely her own, pushed from her body and from her own physical and emotional resources. However, these actions were not her own ‘daily’ movements; they were part of her performance technique.

Barba’s concepts of daily and extra-daily are fundamental to his understanding of theatre anthropology. Performers, stripped of their accultured everyday behaviour, adopt a performance mode of behaviour. Barba writes:

The social use of our body is necessarily the product of a culture: the body has been accultured and colonized. It knows only the uses and perspectives for which it has been educated. In order to find others, it must detach itself from its models. It must inevitably direct itself towards a new form of 'culture' and undergo the latter's 'colonization.' But it is precisely this path which makes the actor discover his own life, his own independence and his own physical eloquence. (Barba, 1986: 95)

By moving beyond this acquired mode of behaviour, Barba believes that actors may uncover their own unique grace and individuality as performers. The result is movement, voice, expression, and imagination that has been distilled as 'human': unique to the individual, but recognizable to many.

For Barba, a significant component of theatre anthropology is its research into diverse theatrical forms. During a trip to Asia, he observed that powerful performers from a wide range of cultures and performance contexts adopted similar techniques, such as a relaxed, bent-knee stance that allows an actor to be ready to engage in movement, action, gesture, or sound at any moment and in any direction (Barba, 1995: 6). Barba's has constructed theatre anthropology in order to try and understand how "different performers, at different places and times and in spite of the stylistic forms specific to their tradition have shared common principles" (Barba and Savarese, 1991: 8).

Forming the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) in 1979, Barba has brought together practitioners, scholars, and students from around the world to investigate the principles of performance across artistic and cultural forms. The first ISTA session was held in Bonn in 1980 and since then these sessions have taken place throughout the world; from Italy (1981, 1987, 1990), France (1985), and Spain (2004) to Great Britain (1992), Brazil (1994), and Poland (2005). In its mission statement, ISTA is described as an established 'multicultural network' of performers and scholars, collaborating and exchanging information and contacts. The goal of ISTA is to "meet and be confronted with

a pedagogical practice different from the usual. The goal is to ‘learn to understand’”  
(Barba, 1986: 121).<sup>47</sup>

Over the years, ISTA has attracted a wide range of performers, including the famous Odissi dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi, Nihon Buyo dancer Katsuko Azuma, Kyogen actor Kosuka Namura, Taiwanese opera master Tsao Chun-Lin, Decroux-trained Ingemar Lindh, and Candomblé performer, Augusto Omolú. Each one of these performers has trained in a highly codified performance technique. During an ISTA session, these practitioners lead workshops with participants on their particular performance forms. Besides these workshops, however, a large component of ISTA is one-on-one public workshops between the invited performers and Barba. In these sessions, he dissects their performances, and asks them to demonstrate repeatedly specific elements of a dance, a sequence of movements, or a gesture in an attempt to expose the structural and biological principles that compose a particular technique.

At the 1995 ISTA in Umeå in Sweden, Barba’s colleague Ferdinando Taviani notes a session with Balinese actor and dancer, I Made Djimat. Taviani observes that Barba often asked the performer to ‘absorb’ his movements. Gradually reducing the size of each action, gesture, and step by half and then again in half, Barba sought to focus Djimat’s work to the smallest possible movements so that he might be able to internalise each element while still maintaining the energy and structure of the movements. As Taviani writes of the result:

I Made Djimat had ‘absorbed’ one of his dances and repeated it in miniature while sitting on a chair. Instead of flying through space, he now seemed to remain in a quivering immobility. His feet, his hands, his trunk and his eyes followed diverse and simultaneous microscopic paths, the same ones which, on a large scale, had composed his classical Balinese dance. And we spectators...were irresistibly led into interpreting them as symptoms of an intricate psychological reaction. (Hastrup, 1996: 52)

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<sup>47</sup> ISTA’s mission statement is available on Odin Teatret’s website: [www.odinteatret.dk/research/ista.aspx](http://www.odinteatret.dk/research/ista.aspx)



Ultimately, ISTA is a place during which Barba attempts to reduce the codified forms – in this case Balinese dance – to their skeletal structure, making the movements smaller and smaller in an attempt to uncover the powerful principles underscoring this highly stylised performance form.

Like the very concept of theatre anthropology, the work undertaken during ISTA has raised difficult questions regarding the cultural specificity of the theatrical practices investigated. Rustom Bharucha has been particularly vocal in criticizing Barba's work, arguing that the biological, performance technique that Barba seeks to uncover can in no way be removed from its respective sociocultural context. He states: "[o]ur differences of history cannot be subsumed in a 'tradition of traditions' that cuts across all national, temporal and spatial barriers" (Bharucha, 1993: 62) because, for him, this neglects to take into account the vital distinctions in cultural and artistic forms that make them distinct in the first place.

For Bharucha, Barba's search for a biological level of performance technique is a naïve assumption that completely disregards not only cultural specificity but its fundamental role in artistic expression. As he argues, an actor's presence on stage is interwoven with every aspect of that person's being – from their culture and history to their social position, religion, and gender. All of these aspects are brought to the stage and cannot be removed. To do so, Bharucha asserts, is to ignore, and disrespect, the form itself. He questions:

Does it really matter whether Katsuko Azuma's principle of life can be described as a 'centre of gravity, which is found at a midpoint of a line which travels from the navel to the coccyx?' (Barba 1986, p.15). This may be a 'useful' insight for her as a performer, but I have to believe that there must be other aspects from her culture, from her being alive as a woman at a particular point in history, that contribute to this principle of life, *even on a pre-expressive level*. If I did not believe this to be possible, then Katsuko Azuma would cease to be a woman. She would be an anatomy. (Bharucha, 1993: 59)

Bharucha's argument is certainly valid. To reduce culturally specific artistic forms to their most skeletal, biological level separates artistic expression from the particular social influences that shape it. Undoubtedly, Azuma is a woman who brings her own style, her own personal way of moving, her own mode of expression, and her own cultural heritage, personal history, and social life *as* a woman into her performance of Nihon Buyo. But these 'socialized' forms of movement are precisely what Barba is attempting to deconstruct.

In essence, Barba is trying to understand how to train actors. Bharucha asks that, "[s]urely when I watch Sanjukta Panigrahi dance..., it is not merely to observe the displacement of energy in her body or the tensions embodied in her immobility" (Bharucha, 1993: 57). However, my response to this – within Barba's own framework – is that it is *precisely* this 'displacement of energy' and 'tensions embodied in her immobility' that Barba is asking us to observe. His methods are contentious, arguably too methodical, and even sterile. However, Barba's aim is to analyse the biological forms of movement – whether a way of moving the arm, holding the head, or shifting the gaze – in an attempt to reveal its very core. As Watson explains at length:

The premise underlying Barba's explorations... is that biologically all human beings are essentially the same. No matter which culture an actor is from, his or her body consists of a certain mass, a trunk and extremities, has a centre of gravity, and opposing groups of muscular tensions that he or she uses to walk, stand up, sit down, dance, etc. And, regardless of a performer's chosen genre – be it Topeng, Odissi, Noh or corporeal mime – these biological givens are physical tools he or she has to work with. Each form may require the performer to combine or use these tools differently, but often there are common biological principles underlying the uses of the body. Noh actors must bend their knees and keep their hips locked throughout most of the performance, for example, while Odissi dancers must frequently bend their spine into a horizontal 'S' shape while standing on one foot. But, as Barba's research has revealed, these very different socio-cultural body techniques are based on similar common principles: both alter the normal centre of gravity, both require the performers to adjust their day-to-day pattern of muscular tensions in order to retain balance, and both result in an other than ordinary distribution of body weight. It is these common principles that underlie the performer's culture-based expression. These are the pre-expressive factors that inject 'presence' into everything the performer does on stage. (Watson, 1996: 228)

Even if we accept this, theatre anthropology is a very uninspiring way to engage with beautiful, powerful, and deeply rich stylized forms of performance. Bharucha does acknowledge that he has difficulty understanding why anyone would want to engage with performance at this biological level. He writes: “I suppose that, at the very heart of my objection to Barba's ‘laws’ (or ‘rules of behaviour’), is my inability to see any performance on an exclusively pre-expressive level” (Bharucha, 1993: 57).<sup>48</sup> Despite this, his overriding intention is to ask that theatre practitioners who work with diverse cultural and artistic forms be very conscious of the cultures with which they are engaging, and respectful of the fact that every piece of artistic material is deeply embedded within something much larger and more meaningful than the individual movements, gestures, and sounds themselves.

With this criticism, however, Jane Turner comments that it seems “Barba has backed himself into a corner” (Turner, 1997: 122). In recent years, ISTA sessions have slowly become less of a focus for the group, their height being during the 1980s and 1990s. It is difficult to say whether or not this has anything to do with the criticism they have drawn. Within the scope of Barba and the Odin’s work, however, ISTA has been an attempt to learn how to train better performers. For Barba, performers are performers, and good performers – irrespective of their culture – have an ability to move an audience, open their imaginations and their hearts to new possibilities.

An equally important component of ISTA is to provide an opportunity for performers from vastly diverse backgrounds to work with one another and learn from each

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<sup>48</sup> Bharucha continues: “To juxtapose Sanjukta Panigrahi with Fo, as Barba does in a series of photographs in *Beyond the Floating Islands* (1986) serves only to highlight the antitheses of the performers. What is Barba seeing in their correspondences that lie ‘beyond culture, history and style’? Clearly, the laws of *bios* (on which they are apparently connected) are invisible” (Bharucha, 1993: 57). On first glance, it is possible to understand how juxtaposing pictures of Panigrahi with Fo seems trite at best, and culturally disrespectful at worst. On deeper examination, however, *underneath* the forms, both performers demonstrate a strong internal power, something quite inexplicable that somehow captures the eye. Describing such a thing as an actors’ ‘presence’ is difficult. However, it is something audiences recognize and respond to, and it is this which Barba is seeking to uncover. Essentially, Barba’s search is a question of how to train ‘good’ actors.

other. An example of this is *Theatrum Mundi*, the culminating event at each ISTA session. *Theatrum Mundi* is a collaboration between international guest performers who practice diverse performance techniques. Using a wide range of classical texts, they develop a piece together and perform the results of their collaboration at the end of the ISTA meeting. During the process, each performer is encouraged to maintain his or her own distinctive style, while simultaneously searching for some kind of common language, rhythm, or tone. In this way, the practitioners meet one another through their own cultures and contexts, learning new ways in which to engage with one another in a performance setting.

Panigrahi, who was involved in ISTA from the very beginning, notes that, while the strict discipline of her traditional Odissi training does not allow her to adopt other techniques or styles, the sessions at ISTA helped illuminate aspects of her own work. In discussing a *Theatrum Mundi* performance at the Salento ISTA in 1987, she observes:

There was a moment in *Faust* in which [Nihon Buyo dancer] Katsuko Azuma was Faust and I was Mephisto, when she dug and uncovered the clothes of the newborn baby – an action performed in silence. I don't know why but at that moment I felt a great strength within me, like a powerful poem, not just commas. Before that I had also used silence. It is a part of my classical tradition. But in Salento I had a new perception of it. [...] I have found a different meaning, not in my way of dancing, but in my way of feeling for it. (Hastrup, 1996: 90)

It is precisely this kind of experience, where ideas, techniques, styles, and conventions may be discussed openly, for which Barba is searching.

Barba specifies that, during the process, new relationships develop through honest interactions where, ideally, “confrontation should not impose one’s own horizon or way of seeing, but rather provoke a displacement which makes it possible to discover a territory beyond one’s known universe” (ibid.: 30). Highlighting each individual’s sense of self through contact with others is a fundamental component of ISTA. By bringing diverse cultural practices into an encounter with one another, it is possible to understand that Barba not only investigates some level of underlying commonality, but in fact emphasises and

celebrates each cultural practice's specific context as performers communicate and connect with one another.

These close experiences between practitioners, scholars, and students during an ISTA do tend to create tight social bonds. With any event lasting from a single week to two months – as was the case during the 1981 event in Volterra – ISTA sessions attempt to generate a wider international community of theatre practitioners, academics, and students who become involved in the world of the festival, living in what anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup refers to as the 'performers' village'. While the ISTA village is by no means an ethnocultural or geopolitical village rooted in a particular location, nor does it maintain its own cultural history or traditions, Hastrup explains that it does involve its participants to the extent that they "practice the place to a degree that a very particular experience of belonging to a social world, defining its own reality, is created" (Hastrup, 1996: 11).

Within the framework of the Odin's work, ISTA has become an integral component of the actors' drive towards establishing a wide and supportive social network beyond the group itself. As discussed earlier, an important aspect of the Odin's own self-understanding stems from the artistic and social discrimination the group experienced during its earliest years. Struggling to develop its own path despite what Barba refers to as "marginalization and madness..., refusing to be reduced to impotence and silence" (Barba, 1986: 211-212), the Odin has held tightly to ideals of individuality and freedom. His statement indicates how seriously he considers the discrimination he and the Odin experienced. The group's work therefore reaches out to other performing groups fighting for their right to practice theatre however they may choose.

Barba has developed his own artistic community that he calls 'third theatre', which incorporates performing groups who work in distinct opposition to the conventional methods of performance. 'Third theatre' groups are overwhelmingly from Latin America:

Cuatrotablas and Yuyachkani in Peru; Libre Teatro Libre and Comuna Baires from Argentina; Cuba's Grupa Teatro del Tercer Mundo. It has also included the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre from Wales, Polish group Akademia Ruchu, Belgium's El Théâtre Elementaire de Bruselas, and Italian companies Teatro di Ventura, Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo (Watson, 2002: 172-174; 200).

According to Barba, 'third theatre' groups are also 'floating islands', whose members

can only survive on one of two conditions: either by entering the circle of established theatre, accepting the laws of supply and demand, conforming to fashionable tastes, giving way to the preferences of political and cultural ideologists, and adapting themselves to the latest acclaimed results; or by succeeding through continuous work to individualize their own area, seeking what for them is essential and trying to force others to respect this diversity. (Barba, 1986: 193-194)

Like the Odin, these groups have struggled to define themselves in opposition to the accepted, dominant culture and are bound together through their dedication to theatre as a way of life.

By drawing these 'floating island' groups into an alternative category, Barba's concept of 'third theatre' aims to provide a network of support for these "autodidacts..., trying to find and build their own technical and artistic paths" (ibid.: 122). Barba has therefore instigated 'third theatre' gatherings, the first of which took place in Belgrade in 1979. Since then, the Odin has organised gatherings in Italy, Spain, Mexico, Argentina, and Peru with the intention of bringing small, isolated performing groups into a common space where they can meet. During these gatherings, the groups present work, exchange ideas, conduct workshops, and lead seminars for one another, where topics have included political issues such as the effect of violence within Peruvian society, or theatrical themes such as ways in which to incorporate Decroux's techniques into daily training (Watson, 1993: 22).

Together, these groups serve as a resource, providing a necessary means of support in order to continue to survive on the margins of society where many of them struggle against economic, social, or political pressures (Watson, 2002: 204). A common feature of ‘third theatre’ groups is their dedication to the production of theatre, irrespective of fame, conventions, and expectations. ‘Third theatre’ battles against the notion of an accepted, mainstream approach to theatre and instead embraces the cultural and social function of performing groups as they fight to establish their own “socio-creative need to make theatre” (ibid.: 171). By gathering groups who share the Odin’s desire to make theatre against the grain, Barba and the actors have carefully built a wider support system for isolated performing groups who maintain a conscious engagement with the social world.

Additionally, ‘third theatre’ can be seen as an attempt for the Odin to preserve and strengthen its own sense of identity. Identifying others who are defined similarly and creating a system through which these groups may find support, the actors seek actively to ensure their own survival as a group. Because Barba believes that the Odin operates outside the accepted societal norms – living “on the fringes...on the outskirts of the centres and capitals of culture” (Barba, 1986: 193) – he and the actors have constructed a practice that reaches out to others with whom the Odin feels some level of commonality.

Durkheim suggests that it is inevitable that those who do not share the common views of society form their own group. He notes:

When a certain number of individuals...are found to have ideas, interests, sentiments, and occupations not shared by the rest of the population, it is inevitable that they will be attracted toward each other under the influence of these likenesses. They will seek each other out, enter into relations, associate, and thus, little by little, a restricted group, having its special characteristics, will be formed in the midst of the general society. (Durkheim, 1964: 14)

Through ‘third theatre’, then, the Odin manufactures its own surrogate community, bringing together performing groups defined by their commitment to their theatre practice.

In this created community, the Odin functions as a mentor as it guides and supports the struggling groups with whom it identifies. Sharing tips and techniques that helped it through its own uncertain early years, the Odin has in essence built a support system for these groups that it itself lacked as a young performing group. In this sense, Barba understands the Odin's role as a direct link between people; an active generating force that consciously seeks to forge connections in the attempt to create its own inclusive, alternative community.

On an even wider level, Barba believes that the theatre is a natural place for bringing people together. He states that the "theatre has become the tool for encounters and exchanges to overcome mutual indifference. It is a technique that establishes relationships, helps to withstand conformity, and builds bridges" (Barba, 2006: 109). Theatre binds together the individual members of the group, gathers together other similarly defined groups into a larger surrogate community, and extends well beyond the theatre and into the world.

The links between people across a significantly wider network is precisely what Barba and the Odin explore in their barbers. In the summer of 1974, the group travelled to Carpignano, a small village in southern Italy, in order to prepare their next production. For ten years, the group had been based in Holstebro, building their training and devising performances behind closed doors, and limiting their performances to Holstebro and to small European tours. Barba explains of this period:

[I]t was through its performances that the group opened itself to the outside world. The performances were given for sixty to seventy people, the maximum number that could be fitted into our work room. They were above all *our* performances and we refused to change them when we were on tour and it would have been possible to accommodate a larger audience. The performances stayed within the borders of the small area in which they had been born. (Barba, 1986: 12)



By maintaining control of the conditions in which they performed and keeping the internal life of the group sacred, the Odin carefully protected its borders.

When the group travelled to Carpignano, the actors simply wanted to “prepare [a] new production in human, social and geographic surroundings that were out of the ordinary” (Barba, 1986: 158). They therefore structured their lives just as they had in Holstebro; training, rehearsing, and living together, the group stayed away from the village in order to continue their work in isolation. Barba notes: “It seemed natural to behave there as we did at home: ‘secret’ training work and ‘secret’ preparations for a new production, activities not oriented to the outside” (ibid.: 13).

One day the group left their villa in order to visit some friends. Walking through the village, the members of the Odin were wearing colourful training clothes and carrying instruments for the evening gathering. In Carpignano, “a place where theatre had never existed and had no meaning” (ibid.: 174), the actors’ presence in the village was met with intense curiosity. The local people began to follow the members of the Odin through the streets, asking them to play music.

They soon found that their friends were not at home and were, for “the first time, in so many years of theatre work, ... face to face with people in the street” (ibid.: 170). They began to play, singing songs and showing material they were familiar with – namely pieces of folk music from Norway and Denmark – combined with acrobatics and other elements from their training. When they had finished, they were surprised to find that their audience responded by beginning to sing their *own* songs – songs which, as Shevtsova points out, had been “handed down from generation to generation, as such, were integral to the community’s cultural identity” (Shevtsova, 2002: 112). This became known as barter, or an exchange of songs, dances, rituals, stories, games, or any other cultural material that

defined a community as a community, between the Odin on one hand, and diverse ethnic and social groups on the other.

Barba and the Odin have travelled the world, organising barterers from major cities such as Paris and Bahía Blanca to smaller communities throughout Italy (Gavoi, Monteisai). The nature of the interaction depends on the groups with whom the Odin engages. Oftentimes, barter takes on a sociopolitical dimension. In Monteisai, for instance, those attending the barter were asked to each bring a book from their own collection in order to build the village's first public library. Likewise, in Gavoi, the Odin encouraged the community's participants to use the barter to raise awareness of the poor working conditions in a local factory (Barba, 1986: 176-177). Alternately, the 1992 barter in Tvis in Denmark simply saw a demonstration of the exercises used by the local girl's handball team in its training (Watson, 2002: 99). Ultimately, it doesn't matter to the Odin what is traded, only that it is material *from* and *of* each individual group.

After each group has performed for the other, members from both the participating community and the Odin may teach each other dance steps and songs, inviting people from the crowd to join the action. Ideally, barterers look like a "village hoedown with everybody participating" (Barba, 1986: 159). Most basically, barterers function as a way to bring people together, with both groups embracing and celebrating traditions of their own people. Barter is therefore another form within which Barba finds a place to initiate an alternative system of support, bringing communities together in an open environment of free exchange and celebration.

When successful, the groups involved in a barter have an ability to form a single, new, and all-encompassing community. Because of this particular feature of the Odin's barterers, Ian Watson suggests that they are an example of Victor Turner's concept of 'spontaneous communitas'. Turner defines this as a "direct, immediate and total

confrontation of human identities” (Turner, 1982: 48), within which a deep level of dialogue develops. This creates a space in which the prejudices or assumptions, based on ethnicity, class, religion, or gender, to name a few, of the people involved are suspended in the “‘glory’ of communal understanding” (ibid.).

Watson’s comparison is worth consideration. Barbers do indeed provide a rich space for communication between many different types of people, bringing them together with the possibility to engage with each other in an environment rooted in understanding, awareness, and respect for each other. It is important to note, however, that the Odin’s perception of community does not intend to negate either group’s unique defining characteristics. Each group is simply given a brief, albeit temporary, opportunity to celebrate that which defines them as a group. By placing two differently defined groups in juxtaposition with one another, barbers attempt to draw specific attention to that which makes these groups groups. By consciously highlighting their differences as groups, the Odin’s barbers seek to acknowledge and emphasize each group’s individuality.

An extreme example of this phenomenon can be seen in the 1976 barber that the Odin conducted with the Yanomami Indians, an indigenous tribe of Amazonian Venezuela. This particular barber was initiated by the French anthropologist, Jacques Lizot, who spent years working with the Yanomami, and the Kurare Film Cooperative in Caracas (Barba, 1986: 161). According to Lizot, the Yanomami’s understanding of the world had been largely shaped by their limited interactions with scientists, government authorities, and missionaries. His intention in inviting the Odin was to provide the community with another perspective of the world beyond their own tribe (Barba, 2002: 186).

Parts of this barber were captured in the short documentary, *Theatre Meets Ritual* (1976). The exchange begins with the members of the Odin, dressed in their brightly coloured costumes, moving through the jungle exuberantly, some on stilts, some pounding

on drums. The performers are met by members of the tribe and together they form a circle. The barter starts cautiously. The members of the Odin sing short songs, which the Yanomami reply to with an encouraging and energetic, “Ho!” A woman and two young girls from the tribe dance shyly through the circle, smiling but appearing embarrassed. The Odin responds appreciatively and expands the circle as an actor breaks into an acrobatic dance performed with a flag, leaping, twisting, and twirling as the Yanomami, with painted faces and bare skin, the men strapped with bows and arrows, watch with curiosity. Later, the tribe’s shaman performs a traditional story of a tortoise that killed a jaguar, which ends with an impassioned portrayal of the animal’s death as the shaman slaps his thighs and tightens his voice, guttural sounds and words streaming from his lips as he writhes on the ground.

From the video documentation, it appears as if, at least on some level, the exchange was success for both communities. The Odin and the Yanomami met each other and exchanged their songs, dances, and stories, and both groups seemed engaged, curious, and open to what the other was presenting. Beyond this raw film footage, however, critical analysis of this barter is distinctly lacking. From the Odin’s perspective, their exchange with the Yanomami “was the most incisive of barter: the representatives of a culture that believes in progress in front of a community on the verge of extinction” (Barba, 2002: 186). But this raises a vital question: how can two communities engage with each other equal terms when the categories that separate so firmly delineated?

Barba and the Odin were aware of the sensitivity of this meeting: “‘It is not a good idea,’ we said to the anthropologists when they originally invited us to come. ‘Our theatre does not mean anything to the Yanomami. We will not be able to communicate with them’” (ibid.: 185-186). Yet Barba’s language also indicates a perspective that remains within a particular power paradigm – ‘Our theatre does not mean anything to them’ and ‘We will

not be able to communicate with them'. In no accounts of this barter is there any indication of the Yanomami as a people, with opinions, perspectives, impressions, desires. What did this isolated, indigenous tribe think of the Odin's dances and songs? Did it change their perception of the outside world, as intended by the anthropologists who invited the Odin? If so, how? Unfortunately, answers to these questions are not readily available.

This raises the issue of the overwhelming lack of detailed and objective information regarding the impressions of communities with whom Barba and the Odin interact. For this reason, barterers are difficult to evaluate. Anthropologist Mette Bovin has provided the most careful examination of barterers' effects on the participating communities as part of her own fieldwork. In 1982, Bovin and Carreri travelled to the region that is now known as Burkina Faso in order to conduct fieldwork with the Fulbe, Tureg, and Hausa people. Referring to barter as a form of 'provocation anthropology', Bovin's intention was to discover how her presence as an anthropologist could, through an exchange of performance, "be made stronger, more sure, more honest and amusing – in short, less sly?" (Bovin, 1988: 23)

Carreri began the interactions with the communities: dressed as a man in a white button-down shirt and black trousers, braces, a bow-tie, and a black top hat, she simply walked into villages as Bovin observed the people's reactions. These encounters progressed into more elaborate exchanges as she and Carreri offered their own songs, dances, and performances to the people they met. The two women also organised larger meetings with local artists and musicians.

On the whole, Bovin and Carreri found that people were extremely curious about them. Watching and following Carreri as she moved through the streets, children were delighted and adults often asked if she was crazy, confused by her masculine clothes.

Because Bovin and Carreri had something to offer these communities themselves, Bovin found she was able to justify her presence more easily to the people. She relates that she would explain:

‘I will see and learn something about your dances, songs, music, magic, and masks in the same way you ask us about our dances, songs, masks, etc.’ There was an equality in the exchange that made for an increased understanding between the partners. We, as they, had become informants. They, as we, had become observers. This was our common ground. (Bovin, 1988: 37)

Returning to the same villages a year later, Bovin found that “by far the majority...had been impressed by Carreri as ‘a radiation of energy’ and power”, that the barbers had allowed many people to gain “a new perception of white women...[where they] were surprised to think that they could be ‘so strong’” (ibid.: 32). In relation to her own work, she found that the barbers had given her intimate knowledge of and access to the villages in a way that she might not have been able to achieve otherwise.

Analysing the form as a cultural encounter as much as an artistic exchange, Bovin’s documentation provides a necessary perspective on the nature of barbers. It must be noted, however, that her research accounts only for the interactions between a single actor and a larger community. It does not illuminate the wider issues raised by barbers between two *groups* of people, nor does it analyse the way in which communication, identification, and understanding may – or may not – develop between the two groups throughout the course of the interaction.

The other issue to highlight is that, in most cases – including Bovin and Carreri’s work in Africa – Barba and the Odin initiate the interactions, travelling to communities who do not know them, and who are unaware that an exchange of cultural material will be requested of them. To return again to Bharucha, he argues that, for a cultural exchange to be ethically responsible, artists and cultures must reach out to *one another*. Most often, however, cultural interactions are initiated by groups that, in the first place, have the

resources to travel. In this way, Bharucha identifies what he explains as a ‘disequilibrium of cultures’, which has

materialized through the overload of materials from First World economies, which have been indiscriminately imposed on ongoing processes of culture, particularly in those parts of the world and among those indigenous communities who are not in a position to negotiate their increasingly vulnerable positions in the larger context of globalization, the marketing and patenting of biodiversity, and the homogenization of diverse cultural identities. (Bharucha, 1997: 32)

By defining the framework for the interaction, the dominant group dictates the interaction and reaffirms the power structure. Irrespective of their desire for inclusivity, openness and respect, a concern with the Odin’s barter is that they still define the terms of this interaction. The fact that the voices of so many communities with whom the Odin has engaged are not included in Barba’s writings and the research surrounding the Odin indicates a distinct and unfortunate gap in the group’s more socially oriented practices.

For the Odin, barter is fundamentally about creating an open communication between these two distinct groups as they enter into a unique exchange of the material they wish to share. The aim is to allow space for each group involved to not only engage in a rich level of communication through their own unique sign systems, expressing their own cultures and identities as groups, but to find new means of communication by coming into contact with groups defined through different means. The Odin’s professed aim with barter has never been to “spoon-feed...people with theatre, a cultural phenomenon they have lived quite nicely without for centuries”; instead they seek to encourage groups “to answer us with their own voice, their own language, that which still binds them together and makes them strong, although slowly disintegrating: their culture, a culture which does not divide, but unites” (Barba, 1986: 160).

This, however, does not necessarily respond to Bharucha’s warning as cited above. One potential way of thinking through this issue is to return to Barba and the Odin’s own

self-image – that of a group in exile, a minority group practicing an alternative practice of art and life on the margins of society. Certainly this perception is problematic: as discussed previously, the Odin is *not* an ethnically defined group, nor can it in any way be compared on a socio-ethnic or cultural basis with indigenous groups such as the Yanomami.

However, on some level, the Odin in fact believes that it *can* be defined as such. And for Barba and the Odin, barter is as much a new experience for them as it is for the communities with which they interact. As can be deduced from the weighted emphasis on the barter's effect on the group itself – as opposed to the culture with whom the group interacts – it is possible to understand that barter has in fact been instrumental in helping the Odin shape its own self-definition.

Barba does not deny this. He makes a point to recognise barter has in fact aided in the development of the Odin as a 'cultural' group. Referring to the shift in the group's practice as they began their work with barter, he explains:

Our daily work, our training, which we believed concerned only the individual actors in the group, turned into something else as soon as we opened it up to the outside. It revealed the web of our internal relationships, that which defined us not as performers, but as a small group of people who had a history in common and common attitudes (perhaps not explicit, but certainly concrete and evident) with respect to the reality which surrounded us. The 'secrecy' which we had sought only in order to guarantee ourselves the best possible conditions for our professional development had produced an unexpected result: the crystallization of a 'group culture'. (Barba, 1986: 13)

By coming into contact with other, more 'ethno-social' groups, barter, according to Barba, have effectively shaped, reinforced, and validated the Odin's existence as a group.

Within the wider scope of the Odin's social and artistic work, however, barter do indicate the group's dedication to finding new ways to engage with diverse groups of people. While theatre anthropology and 'third theatre' focus primarily on performers and performing groups, a distinctive feature of barter is that they have brought the Odin into direct contact with *non*-theatre-based communities. Although barter do not focus



specifically on the artistic training of the performer, as do the concepts of theatre anthropology and 'third theatre', they specifically develop the members of the Odin as social beings.

This strong social element of the Odin's barbers demonstrate Barba's progression away from his earliest work with Grotowski. By grounding his investigation not only in the training of actors as engaged performers onstage, but in a full exploration of the social relationships that contribute to the life and work of an actor, Barba has created an approach to performance that emphasises each actor's position within the larger social world. As Taviani notes:

Horacio Czertok [director and co-founder of 'third theatre' group, Teatro Núcleo] writes in the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Opinion* that Barba and the Odin have been for groups what Grotowski has been for the individual actor. 'We can say that Jerzy Grotowski has opened a new dimension for the actor's work. Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret has opened a new dimension in theatre which includes the former and projects it into society'. (Taviani, 1986: 270)

Because the group has anchored its work fundamentally in the social relationships that bind the actors together in a community, Barba and the Odin have created an approach to performance that naturally extends this strong social consideration into the way they engage with the world. By not only taking into account the physical, social, and cultural ties of each individual actor, but by devoted themselves fully to the complete social network that structure and supports their lives as artistic, social beings, Barba and the members of the Odin demonstrate and emphasise theatre's interwoven existence with the wider social world.

## **Chapter Four: Gardzienice**

Founded in 1977 by director Włodzimierz Staniewski, the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practice (Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych Gardzienice) seeks the roots of theatre by integrating the social, spiritual, and natural worlds into their practice of performance. Taking its name from the small Polish village in which it is based, the group grounds its work in the lives and traditions of ethnic and cultural minorities both within Poland and around the world in the belief that theatre emerges most organically through the every day social interactions, practices, and rituals of these communities.

The company has therefore devoted much of its work to exploring forgotten settlements along Poland's eastern border in a search for those who still preserve an active link to their communities, ancestors, gods, and land. Drawing on their experiences in these villages, the actors have shaped not only a unique training, devising, and performance process but a way of life that calls on the voices and landscapes of the past in an attempt to engage directly with the social world through theatre.

This particular approach to performance is strongly influenced by Staniewski's own early artistic experiences. Working as an actor with Grotowski from 1971-1976, Staniewski was actively involved in Grotowski's paratheatrical experiments both in Poland and abroad. As discussed in Chapter Two, paratheatre sought to construct environments in which honest and spontaneous interactions between people would occur. Leszek Kołodziejczyk describes these as:

a cycle of meetings between people who do not know one another..., but gradually upon getting accustomed to one another, rid themselves of mutual fears and distrust; this, in the course of time, causes them to release in themselves the simplest, most elementary inter-human expression. (Schechner and Wolford, 1997: 210)

Moving away from theatrical conventions such as a formal relationship between the actors and the audience, Grotowski created situations in which performers and participants took an active part in an evolving person-to-person interaction.

For Staniewski, however, this approach moved too far away from theatre and, as a result, neglected the vital connection between performance and everyday life.

Unfortunately, there is little concrete documentation regarding Staniewski's own understanding of this crucial distinction. Although the reasons for this will be discussed in greater detail later in this study, this lack of material is due largely to Staniewski's long-standing attempt to separate himself from the work of Grotowski.

This has made Staniewski reluctant to speak of this early and formative period of his work.<sup>49</sup> As a result, the range and depth of scholarly analysis into the artistic relationship between these two directors has been restricted. Available English-language resources on Gardzienice consist primarily of studies written by Halina Filipowicz, Kathleen Cioffi, Paul Allain, and Alison Hodge, whose work, *Hidden Territories*, co-authored by Staniewski himself, has become the essential source on Gardzienice's work.<sup>50</sup> Each of these studies has offered invaluable information regarding the company in their own right, and has rightly referenced the link between Staniewski and Grotowski. However, because of Staniewski's unwillingness to discuss this topic, the studies to date have not been able to provide a complete examination of this line of influence.

These circumstances have also affected the present study, an issue outlined in the Introduction. For this reason, the research here regarding the relationship between these two

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<sup>49</sup> Personal communication, August 2010, Gardzienice.

<sup>50</sup> See: Paul Allain (1997) *Gardzienice: A Theatre in Transition*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, pp. 46-54; Staniewski's interview with Richard Schechner in June 1986, published in Halina Filipowicz (1987) 'Gardzienice: A Polish Expedition to Baltimore', *TDR* 31:1, pp. 159; Kathleen Cioffi (1996) *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, pp. 207, 211-213; and Włodzimierz Staniewski and Alison Hodge (2004), *Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice*, London: Routledge, pp. 3-5, 8. In Polish, see also: Tadeusz Kornaś (2004) *Włodzimierz Staniewski i Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych Gardzienice*, Kraków: Homini, pp. 34-49

directors draws primarily on an analysis of their theatrical work. Using archival material including videos, articles, and photographs, first-hand experience of training, performances, and daily life at Gardzienice, and the aforementioned studies by Filipowicz, Cioffi, Allain, and Hodge, this study will attempt to offer a more penetrating contextualization of the relationship between these two directors. However, it also must be noted at this point that the relationship between Grotowski and Staniewski is not the main focus of this chapter; rather it will be outlined here simply as a means to illuminate the evolution and development of Staniewski's work with Gardzienice.

Following his departure from Grotowski and the work in paratheatre, Staniewski began to search for the natural theatricality of everyday life. In one of the few recorded references he makes to paratheatre, he explains that, in his own work, he seeks to avoid creating theatre that is a “‘closed circle’ fortified by dry rules, rituals”; instead he aims to generate a theatrical space that referred to “‘the substance of the land and the substance of the sky, bound by that area” (Allain, 1997: 51). In an interview with Richard Schechner, Staniewski says that “it was very important to make something with its own performative architecture, possessing more than changing ceremonies and rituals” (Filipowicz, 1987: 159).

Staniewski shared Grotowski's belief that theatre was essentially a social phenomenon; however, his own approach sought to reconnect theatre with the very social material from which he understood it to have emerged. Theatre, according to Staniewski, is a direct product of our social lives – from our daily interactions, routines, and forms of worship to our innate capacity for emotional expression – and is preserved amongst people who maintain a strong and active bond within their communities, their spirituality, and their land. By visiting remote cultures, particularly along Poland's eastern border, learning from the people, and weaving the natural connections embedded in their everyday lives into a

performance structure, Staniewski formed Gardzienice in an attempt to return to the roots of theatre or, as he refers to it, theatre's own 'natural environment'.

For Staniewski, this desire was intensified by the alarming decay of Polish society throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Staniewski relates:

[I]t has become clear to me that my departure and retreat [into the rural areas] followed a deep, instinctive need to resist everything we were dealing with during that period [of history]. It was an uprising of the heart and mind against the injustice, aggression, repression, hypocrisy and humiliation of the times. (Staniewski, 1998: 141)

Although Stalin's regime had collapsed in the mid-1950s, difficult and often severe social, political, and economic conditions continued to affect the Polish population. The Polish communist government's massive efforts to industrialize the country caused a bloated reliance on foreign markets, leading to both heavy international debt and the neglect of domestic production.

By the late 1970s, food shortages, blackouts, police raids, endless queues, strikes, the black market, inflation, and substandard housing became the norm. Davies comments that following the war, the

promised rise in the standard of living was slow to materialize. The Party bureaucracy prospered ostentatiously, to the disgust of ordinary people. ...In response to neo-Stalinist noises emanating from the USSR after the fall of Krushchev in 1964, the Censorship was strengthened.... Cultural figures were reprimanded for maintaining foreign contacts... The students, the intellectuals, the younger, non-factional Party members known as the 'technocrats', all experienced a strong sense of frustration and disillusionment. (Davies, 2005: 441)

During this period, agriculture began a steady decline. Composed 80 percent of the rural population in 1950, farmers only accounted for 60 percent in 1970 before being finally overtaken by industrial workers in 1974 (ibid.: 449). Because the country was no longer producing machinery and parts for its own purposes, the necessary equipment and supplies for these farmers was unavailable or prohibitively expensive. They were forced to work the

land using primitive techniques, and were compensated inadequately for their produce. As a result, Poland's rural population began to disappear throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The war had already dealt a devastating blow to Poland's rich ethnic and cultural heritage. In addition to Poland's Jewish population, which had suffered appalling casualties during the war, Orthodox Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Roma, and smaller minority groups such as the Hucuł and Łemko that had settled along the eastern and southern borders centuries earlier, were systematically targeted and destroyed. To add to this, the map of Poland was dramatically redrawn following the war, shifting the borders to the west as the country took control of former German lands and lost land in the east to the USSR.

As a result, millions of people in both rural and urban areas were forced to leave their land: uprooted, deported, expelled, or resettled. Davies describes that for three years following the war, "Polish roads and railways were crammed with endless processions of refugees, deportees, repatriates, transients, expellees, and internal migrants" (Davies, 2005: 419). Over five million Germans alone were deported from Poland's newly extended western border, causing cities such as Wrocław, formerly the German city of Breslau, to become almost entirely emptied of people. Areas such as Ukraine and the Bieszczady region of the Carpathian mountains continued to be fought over following the war, suffering badly from guerrilla warfare where villages were systematically razed, forcing the removal of the "entire population of the highland Lemko and Bojko clans...through the 'Recovered Territories'" (Davies, 2005: 419) Poland's once diverse population, which had been close to 30 percent of the total population in 1931, plummeted to a mere 1.3 percent in only forty years (ibid.: 299; 447).

For Staniewski, the disappearance of this fundamental diversity of Polish culture was a tragic loss. As these traditional communities vanished, Staniewski believed that people would be left unaware of their history and ancestors, thereby losing the very

material that contributes to a sense of cultural identity and belonging. He explains: “[W]e have lost our stable reference points. At one time human beings referred to nature, its structures and its laws. Nature is no longer an ethical reference point. But if we don’t have reference points we are definitely lost, we cannot create” (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 21). These ‘stable reference points’, according to Staniewski, rest in those people who have maintained strong links to their natural environment – to the natural world, to their traditions, their languages, religions, and cultural practices. His work with Gardzienice has therefore sought to re-establish these reference points by reviving links to the diverse lives and voices of these communities.

Working from the grounds of an abandoned seventeenth-century manor house overlooking modest working farms, rough dirt roads, and pockets of undisturbed birch forest, the actors’ daily lives have grown to include not only the group’s artistic activities, but the hard reality of living in a remote rural environment.<sup>51</sup> This has left its mark on every aspect of the group’s life, from their outdoor training, music and movement work, devising, and performances to everyday tasks such as carrying out essential maintenance on the theatre’s grounds, helping the local community, performing administrative duties, cooking, and cleaning. Over the years, life has improved in the village, providing easier access to more reliable phone lines, electricity, indoor plumbing, and even the internet. Because of the village’s isolation and, particularly, the extremely difficult winters, few of the actors live in Gardzienice permanently even today. Working in blocks of time scheduled throughout the year, most of the actors commute from Lublin, a thirty-minute drive, or Warsaw, a three-hour journey.

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<sup>51</sup> These and other details regarding Gardzienice daily life, training, performances, including its buildings, surroundings, and the local village, have been compiled from research conducted during my visits to the company between 2008 and 2010.

In over thirty years of practice, Gardzienice's work has changed considerably. The group has shifted from a strong focus on the ethnic and cultural diversity in Poland to its more recent investigations, which centre on artistic practices in ancient Greek ritual. Additionally, a drastic shift in Poland's sociopolitical environment following the collapse of the Soviet Union has altered the context in which the group works. For these reasons, the group's work can be divided into two distinct phases: the first spanning from the group's formation in 1977 until approximately 1993; and the second from 1993 until the present.

During the first phase, Staniewski and the actors focused primarily on the multi-ethnic cultures of Poland, centring their work on what the group refers to as expeditions. The group would travel throughout the eastern and southern borders of the country to meet with isolated villages of Hucuł, Łemko, Ukrainians, Old Believers, and Poles to listen to their stories, share music, celebrations, jokes, and news in a time when these communities were severely cut off from the rest of the world. As Cioffi observes, the group entered a village in these early expeditions "more like sons and daughters returning for a visit than like scientists" (Cioffi, 1996: 208).

A vital component of expeditions was gatherings, where the actors and the villagers would meet outside, or in the biggest room available, in order to exchange songs, dances, and other traditional practices. Often rowdy and lasting long into the night, these events were an opportunity for villagers to sing songs and tell stories that they had not thought of in years. For the actors, gatherings were unique in that they also allowed the group to learn new material and to test segments of performances in an open environment, with a live audience. In addition to being a social event, these early gatherings were an active laboratory for Gardzienice where the physical, textual, and musical material of their performances was both developed and refined.



Because many of these communities with which the company was interacting had rarely if ever been exposed to theatre, Gardzienice found that the villagers' reactions – of delight, surprise, horror, or fascination – were for the most part expressed spontaneously and without inhibition. The actors' early performances drew directly on these responses, in addition to the particular energy of the gatherings, and the local environment in which they took place. The performances during this time, *An Evening Spectacle* (*Spektakl Wieczorny*) (1977), *Sorcery* (*Gusła*) (1981), and *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum* (*Żywot protopopa Awwakuma*) (1983), were highly energetic, followed little logical narrative, and were full of mystery, ritual, and symbolic imagery. Including acrobatics, spectacle, ecstatic dancing, and wild singing, these performances blended vital elements from the daily lives of these traditional communities, from songs and stories to dances and gestures, with Romantic poetry, religious texts, ancient legends, and mythology, ultimately seeking to create a theatre that came immediately from the local people.

After the fall of the communist government in Poland in 1989, the country saw significant changes in a short span of time. As a new democratic process began to establish itself in the former Soviet satellite, Poland's borders were thrown open. This made connections to the rest of the world easier, allowing for increased possibilities to tour, research, and interact with communities outside of eastern Europe. Gardzienice's work naturally responded to this massive social, political, and cultural upheaval. Premiering in 1990, their production of *Carmina Burana* created a bridge from their work under Polish communism and marked a new approach to performance in a society with increased freedom through an exploration of the nature of love. Basing their production on the Celtic story of *Tristan and Iseult*, music from the Carmina Burana codex, and Georgian singing, the group began its shift away from its formerly exclusive exploration of artistic and cultural traditions from within Poland.

Following *Carmina Burana*, the company almost entirely abandoned their former expeditions as an ensemble and began to search for the origins of theatre in the lost culture of ancient Greece. The group's specific reasons behind this shift in their work are largely undocumented. Devoting their work to the images of the body as portrayed through sculpture, painting, and on fragments of pottery, in addition to reconstructing the music from notation included in ancient texts, Gardzienice's current work no longer focuses directly on unearthing the social and cultural material of traditional communities. For this reason, the group's second phase of work, from approximately 1993 to the present, is not the primary focus of this study. Instead, the present chapter is devoted to Gardzienice's first period of work: its expeditions, gatherings, training, devising, and performances between 1977 and 1993.

Despite its current focus on antiquity, it must be noted that Gardzienice does continue to investigate the meeting place between life and theatre. From the remote village of Gardzienice, the actors have established an artistic practice as a life practice that continues to research ways of life – be they from the local community or from ancient texts – that are bound to the land and its people. According to Tönnies, this strong connection to the natural world has profound implications for the social group. He asserts that social relationships

[grow] stronger and deeper when the land is cultivated. ...The area settled and occupied is...a common heritage, the land of the ancestors toward which all feel and act as descendants and blood brothers. ...It represents a common sphere of will and not only upholds the unity of contemporaneous generations but also links together past and future ones. Habit, next to the ties of blood, forms the strongest bond among contemporaries, and, likewise, memory links the living to the dead. (Tönnies, 1955: 240)

Building a theatre community that is immersed in the lives and practices of people who continue their cultural traditions, Gardzienice is an ensemble devoted to reviving the

essential conditions for the creation of theatre through the development of its own communal existence as a social performing group.

### **Gardzienice's Formation**

This fascination with the links between life and theatre draws on Staniewski's own artistic experiences and by the sociopolitical situation in Poland at the latter half of the twentieth century. Beginning his artistic career at university in the 1960s, Staniewski first became involved in the political student theatre movement with the Kraków theatre company, Teatr STU. Formed in 1966, this theatre company was started by acting students frustrated by the superficiality of their theatre education, which they believed lacked a deeper internal focus for the performer (Cioffi, 1996: 111). Under the direction of Krzysztof Jasiński, the students established a group that incorporated an ongoing, rigorous training in both physical and vocal work. Eventually, this grew into an actors' studio, allowing them to continue their own research while training those younger than them (ibid: 112).

Like other student theatres of the time, a fundamental component of Teatr STU was its strong political engagement. Operating during the extreme economic, political, and social turbulence of the 1960s, this theatre devoted its performances to providing an 'indirect critique of the Polish socio-political situation' (ibid: 114). Working around the communist government's censorship laws, Teatr STU's first major production, *Falling* (*Spadanie*), in which Staniewski premiered, opened in Poland in November 1970.

*Falling* premiered a month before the country was hit by a major food crisis. Davies describes that during this period, agriculture "became the problem child of the economy. Decollectivization in 1956-7 had decimated the number of collective farms, leaving 83 per cent of the arable land in the private ownership of small, ill-equipped, horse-drawn peasants" (Davies, 2005: 447). Despite decollectivization, the government continued to

favour larger state-owned farms. Smaller farming communities lacked not only proper equipment, but were not sufficiently compensated by the government for their labour and produce.

As a result, food shortages became one of the largest concerns that plagued the government. The crisis of December 1970 began when the severity of the shortages caused Party Secretary Władysław Gomułka to raise food prices 20 percent in one night. Davies comments: “Having thus invited the strikes and demonstrations which ensued, the government panicked, and ordered the militia and the army to restore order with all means at their disposal” (Davies, 2005: 444). Shops were looted; trains carrying workers were ambushed; the party headquarters were attacked and Gomułka was forced to resign (ibid).

The situation in Poland at the time of *Falling*’s premiere was tense. Teatr STU had based their production on the 1963 poem by Polish poet Tadeusz Różewicz, entitled ‘Falling, or On the Vertical and Horizontal Elements in the Life of Contemporary Man’, a philosophical examination of humankind’s fall from grace. Layering texts by Baudelaire, Ginsberg, Gorky, Mao Tse Tung, and Sartre with works by Polish poets, interviews with revolutionaries, and segments from contemporary news reports, Teatr STU challenged the official doctrine of the communist government in the attempt to confront the deteriorating situation in Poland (Cioffi, 1996: 112-113).<sup>52</sup>

Both Hodge and Allain make a point of referring to the significance of Staniewski’s time with Teatr STU. They note both the direct and indirect influence of the company’s political engagement and, most interestingly, of its strong use of music, in Staniewski’s later work with Gardzienice. In discussing Teatr STU’s work, Maciej Szybist notes that the

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<sup>52</sup> Available information in English regarding Staniewski’s involvement in the company is, as with all of his experience prior to Gardzienice, limited. In English, Cioffi provides a detailed description of Teatr STU’s activities and working process but unfortunately does not elaborate on Staniewski’s role in the company. See: Kathleen Cioffi (1996) op. cit., pp. 111-120. In Polish, see: Tadeusz Kornaś (2004), op. cit., pp. 25-33.

actors “almost always sing their texts...music is part of the staging, it shapes the movement, creates not only the atmosphere...but is in competition with the word in establishing the dynamics of a performance” (Allain, 1997: 46). As will become evident, this reliance on music was to have a strong effect on Staniewski’s own development of his understanding and use of music in the theatre.

In 1971, following a performance of *Falling*, Staniewski was asked by Grotowski to join him in the Laboratory Theatre. For the next five years, Staniewski worked as his close collaborator, during which time he initiated the paratheatre project, *Narrow Special Project* in Australia, France, and the United States in 1973 and 1974 (Filipowicz, 1983: 54-55). He also had a leading role in developing and implementing workshops for the Theatre of Nations’ University of Research held in Wroclaw in 1974 (Schechner and Welford, 1997: 212).

Beyond this, however, there is a distinct lack of concrete information regarding these early years of Staniewski’s theatre practice, as indicated earlier. In a personal communication with the author in August of 2010, Staniewski expressed frustration with those who too readily link his work with Grotowski. This sentiment is marked by Staniewski’s conviction that, over the years, his work with Gardzienice has been overshadowed by the theatre of Grotowski. As Tadeusz Kornaś elaborates:

After leaving the Laboratory Theatre, Włodzimierz Staniewski strongly protested when his work was described as a continuation or extension from that of Grotowski’s. He also protested when any of the elements of Gardzienice’s training were compared with those from the Laboratory. This gives the impression that Staniewski is trying to erase Grotowski’s name from his past. (Kornaś, 2004: 44)<sup>53</sup>

During an interview with Schechner, Staniewski’s reply to a question regarding his link to Grotowski emphasises this point. His response is that his work with Gardzienice does not conform to any “historical order” (Filipowicz, 1987: 159). In his own words:

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<sup>53</sup> English translation for this and subsequent citations from Kornaś’ 2004 book provided by Robert Przekwas.

I get the impression that you need to situate me near Grotowski for your own image of historical order. There are people who forcibly, to my face, use those kinds of political tactics. That repulses me very much. It disgusts me, it alienates me from how I feel, from what in Grotowski's work is close to my heart. What's the use of these politics, all this history-making, day in, day out?

That's why I don't like to speak about my connection with Grotowski. For me personally it's a matter which is unclear. When people ask me this question I feel they want a connection to be there, whether it exists or not. Ask Grot about it... He should say how much he gave me, how much I gave him. This is the eternal question: Do you teach a seven-day-old child, or do you learn from him? (Filipowicz, 1987: 159)

Staniewski's argument seems to be driven by a personal motivation to set himself and his work apart from that of Grotowski so that Gardzienice's work may be understood and appreciated as an idiosyncratic practice. Of course, Staniewski's request for his theatre practice to be experienced and analysed in its own right is perfectly understandable. However, it is equally important to recognize that his artistic practice – nor is any artistic practice – devoid of influence. As Kornaś observes, Staniewski seems to want to erase his past, “[b]ut the past, of course, can not be erased. Zbigniew Osiński wrote: ‘Distance from Grotowski is one of the most distinctive...features of Staniewski's artistic stance, but you cannot overlook the fact that both Gardzienice and its founder did not appear from nothing’” (Kornaś, 2004: 44).

It is inarguable that Staniewski has created work shaped naturally by his own idiosyncratic vision for the theatre. Even Staniewski himself, however, does not deny all influences on his work with Gardzienice. One artistic influence he readily refers to is that of Osterwa and Limanowski, whose work with Reduta has had a particularly strong impact in shaping his own approach to both training and his understanding of theatre. In this context, it would be a gross oversight to ignore Grotowski's own contribution. No matter how much Staniewski would like to avoid the topic, it is undeniable that his own work is marked by his formative experiences with Grotowski.

Most immediately, there are certainly practical similarities between the two directors' work. As Hodge details, these include an "emphasis on the interaction with the environment, the extreme physicality of...actor training and...[an] integration of the artistic activities with daily life" (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 3). This was a direct product of his work with Grotowski. As discussed in Chapter Two, Grotowski's paratheatre brought actors and audiences into nature in order to explore essential human-to-human interactions, not only through social experiments such as long treks into the forest at night-time or walking with closed eyes into a stream just in time to open the eyes as the sun rose, but through silent daily interactions including cooking, cleaning, and chopping firewood (Kumiega, 1985: 161-182). In this respect, the actors ceased to be actors, the audience no longer the audience; all were participants sharing an experience of being together.

Within the framework of paratheatre, Staniewski's work with Grotowski sought to create environments in which people would have profound experiences of themselves, almost ecstatic relationships, within themselves, with others, and in a natural surrounding. Kolankiewicz quotes an anonymous participant in one of Staniewski's paratheatrical projects:

The sound moved me. I found myself running, on my bad leg. Wlodek [Staniewski] stopped the others from following me...The sound of my breathing and my feet gave me a rhythm...I felt the breathing of the 100 people in the centre. I transcended personal pain...I wanted to celebrate...Candles on the floor...Wlodek's work was very real...there was an amazing sincerity and commitment in him that made me dizzy...I left Wroclaw quieted, not talking much. I saw more listened for sound, noticed when people talked out of nervousness and fear, when they babbled, and also noticed those impulses in me...I had more of a need to be broken. (Allain, 1997: 50)

By removing the investigation of social relationships away from theatrical convention, the intention of projects such as these was to allow people to experience the essence of human connection – what Grotowski believed to be the heart of theatre.

For Staniewski, the essence of theatre rests in the organic social situations of life, which he believes to be profoundly and naturally theatrical, and without any need for orchestration. Theatre is part and parcel of the needs, desires, dreams, pains, sorrows, and joys of people. Most specifically, theatre's form refers directly to our innate human ability to express and share these emotions and therefore the very source of theatre can be found in gatherings, where people would tell each other stories, perform rituals, sing songs, exchange news, mourn, celebrate, or dance. For this reason, Staniewski's objection to paratheatre was the specific "lack of measurable, constructed and 'finished' works" (Kornaś, 2007: 14). In other words, there was no theatre in paratheatre.

In 1976, Staniewski left Grotowski to make his own work. He moved to Lublin, on Poland's eastern border with the Ukraine, where he began leading workshops with the local Theatrical Society and started work with Scena 6, a local student theatre group. Soon afterwards, he and a small group of people, some of whom had been working with him in Scena 6, began to travel into the Polish countryside. Their search was for communities that continued an instinctive and natural means of emotional human expression in an attempt to create a performance practice that would rediscover 'a new natural environment for the theatre'. Engaging with communities who maintained their own traditional ways of life, preserving unique cultural and social practices, from daily routines, forms of worship, and mythology to their songs, gestures, and dances, Staniewski sought to create work not "as a self-conscious artistic experiment or a tool for social action and a consciousness-raising device, but rather as an integral part of living itself" (Filipowicz, 1987: 162).

Staniewski's desire to engage with traditional communities also had a strong, albeit implicit, political motivation. The difficult conditions facing Poland's rural and multi-ethnic population had been exacerbated by a cultural programme that sought to emphasize a



unified, centralized socialist society that would abandon any need for political, religious, social or economic diversity. As Milosz writes:

The aim...is to inter-mix the population of the Union. Only by dissolving individual nationalities in the 'Russian Sea' can one attain the goal of a single culture and a single universal language...[T]he aim is not to destroy individual nationalities; the aim is to destroy the class enemy. When the young people learn in Lithuanian, Latvian, or Estonian how to be true patriots of the Union, and how to appreciate all that emanates from the Center, then the Russian language will triumph over all competition. (Milosz, 1980: 230-1)

As a result, ethnic and cultural minorities became components of socialist propaganda, with their cultural traditions, songs, dances, and stories broadcast in light of 'appropriate' and 'unified' Soviet ideology. Staniewski's own opinion of this time was that "a lot of money is poured into folk art, a top priority in the Polish cultural policy. There is a whole army of instructors teaching tradition to rural people. Small wonder that folk art has conformed to what the city wants to see" (Filipowicz, 1983: 56). Believing that Poland was rapidly losing its history and roots as the communist government manufactured a homogenized, socialist version of 'Polish' culture, Staniewski's work came to be devoted to uncovering traditions in a quest to unearth fragments of his own cultural identity. Hodge describes: "Refuting this notion of a common culture, ...he began exploring the multiple aspects of his own culture - historical, ethnic, geographic and artistic" (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 6).

Staniewski's work was therefore centred on the villages and rural areas of Poland – places that still managed to preserve some elements of their cultural and social traditions – as a means through which to identify what he believed to be the disappearing natural source of theatre. He asserts in one of the groups' earlier archival documents: "Theatre is dying because its natural environment is dying. The places in which theatre found its roots are decaying"; he continues by specifying that "[i]n rural areas, or, one can say, in 'forgotten

places' not bounded by conventions of 'proper' behaviour [sic], theatre is a true confrontation. Here, it is possible to have a living communication" (Gardzienice, 1981b).

His desire was to create theatre *of* and *for* the people of Poland, away from the propaganda, censorship, and any manufactured understanding of 'Polish culture' that he saw being actively constructed as a result of the communist government's cultural policies. Staniewski explains:

One had to go away, far away, and find a wholly different context from which to oppose, condemn and protest against the official version of society and the arts. ...I was attracted by...a region that had been a rich source of inspiration for the Polish Romantics in the past, and one that still had authentic, hard ground under its feet in the form of values and customs that had been cultivated for centuries and had resisted ideological corruption. An extreme that withstood the political structure in which we were living. Villages were particularly stalwart defenders of the right to property and personal freedom. (Staniewski, 1998: 141)

For him, these communities were the last bastions of the diverse cultural and artistic traditions of Poland. Living in such isolation from the cities, Staniewski understood that villages such as these had an increased ability to protect their own distinct social, cultural, religious, and everyday practices – including ones that might not conform to the 'accepted' version of Polish culture propagated by the authorities.

As Staniewski indicates in the above quote, this perception of the peasant communities in Poland had long been a source of inspiration for the Romantics. During the nineteenth century, as discussed in Chapter Two, poets drew regularly upon old folk customs, pagan beliefs, and mythology in their work in order to reinforce the dispersed population's sense of solidarity, cultural belonging, and its suppressed diversity. Adam Czarnocki (1784-1825), also known as Zorian Dołęga Chodakowski, was one of the first to collect songs and poems from Poland's countryside. A prominent ethnographer and historian at the turn of the nineteenth century, he published *On Slavism (O Sławiańszczyźnie przed chrześcijaństwem)* in 1818, stating:

We must go to the peasants, visit them in their own thatched huts, take part in their feasts, work and amusements. In the smoke rising above their heads there are still echoing the ancient rites, there are still heard the old songs, and amid singing and dancing are uttered names of the forgotten gods... Alas, our country has not been secured from three sides by sea, so as to be able over the centuries to preserve as much as Scotland. (Halski, 1992: 20)

Gardzienice also drew strongly on the work of Reduta, which had dedicated much of their work to travelling into remote rural areas. Kornaś emphasizes the particular significance that Reduta's co-founder, Mieczysław Limanowski, had on the development of Staniewski's work. Limanowski's *The Polish Year and the Soul of the Collective* (*Rok polski i dusza zbiorowa*, 1916) describes a national theatre that emerges from the cycle of rituals shaping the Polish calendar, where creativity, the sacred, and the natural world blend into one powerful expression of the 'soul' of the people. Kornaś writes that, with Limanowski's text:

Perhaps for the first time, the idea of national theatre was taken clearly and directly from folk rituals. 'Real, substantial Theatre – we are talking about one that lives among the great works of inspiration, so with the full Life of the Soul of collective creation, as Greece had once shown, is the flower of the nation. [...] We need to lure phantoms from the darkness and awaken old sorcerer's rituals, hum old songs of the collective in order to...speak the names of gods forgotten'. The idea of the Expedition seemed to be the answer to this way of thinking. (Kornaś, 2004: 58)<sup>54</sup>

Staniewski therefore took his theatre to the people – and not simply with the intent to perform *for* them, but to create alongside them; visiting the villages, meeting the people, learning from them their own unique ways of life, talking with them, discussing politics, listening to their histories, sharing food, and watching the weather roll in. He allowed Gardzienice's theatre to emerge and grow organically through these interactions. According to Staniewski, the ultimate aim was to “‘celebrate...the simplicity of nature, the simplicity of man... Such simplicity entails humility and mutuality, the readiness to meet another human being’” (Filipowicz, 1987: 145).

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<sup>54</sup> For more information (in Polish) regarding Limanowski's influence on Staniewski's work, see: Tadeusz Kornaś (2004), op. cit., pp. 57-59.

In 1977, Staniewski established his theatre company in the ruins of an old manor house. Once owned by a baron who oversaw much of the surrounding farms, the grounds originally consisted of a grand house, including a room that was covered from floor to ceiling with handmade blue and white Delft tiles dating back to the seventeenth century, and its annex, in addition to a former Arian chapel and ruins of buildings scattered throughout the extensive grounds. During communism, these buildings had been the property of the government – officially, under the collective ownership policy, the property of the people. Apart from a short period of use as a Folk University, which had been established on the grounds in order to offer a meagre education for the local villagers, these buildings had suffered years of neglect, were looted and ransacked, and were left in ruins.

With a population of roughly seven hundred people (Allain, 1997: 23), the village of Gardzienice is in fact two settlements: Gardzienice I and Gardzienice II, which span a distance of roughly four kilometres, separated by a small stream. The region is primarily farmland, giving way to gentle hills and small pockets of forest. Researching the company during the early 1990s, Allain describes that the villagers

have a few cows, chickens and pigs and grow between three and five hectares of wheat or corn. Every cottage has a yard with barns for livestock and crop storage. There was one State-run farm in the village employing about ten people, though this was closed at the end of 1991. ... There is a primary school in the village that serves a wide radius. The nearest health centre is six kilometres away in Piaski and the doctor's frequent visits to the homes of older people must be relied on for medical support. (ibid.)

Although the village has modernized as access to larger towns and cities has improved, many families even today continue to be entirely self-sufficient, harvesting what food they need, preserving enough for the hard winter months, and selling the rest. Like many other villages, Gardzienice has struggled over the years, caught between the world of tradition on one hand, and of modern life on the other.

Living and working initially from the Arian Chapel, the actors began the slow process of renovating the buildings on the manor's estate. These early years were extremely difficult; due to the primitive living conditions and particularly harsh winters, most of the actors lived elsewhere and commuted into Gardzienice once a month for their work with the company – a system that has been maintained to present day. Images of the actors' lives on Gardzienice documented by Andre Gregory in his film *Gardzienice* (1978) and, later, by Jacek Petrycki in *Towards a New Environment for Theatre* (1993) shows performer Dorota Porowska wrapped in a shawl, walking from the well through overgrown fields on a brisk morning carrying a pail of water. Later on, Petrycki shows her talking with an old woman from the village as they wash dishes together in a primitive kitchen.

These conditions, combined with the fact that the company has been in operation for more than thirty years, have led to a relatively high turnover of actors. Arguably, however, these same factors have created an atmosphere of cooperation and dedication amongst the actors, many of whom have stayed with the group upwards of ten years or more. The early members included Tomasz Rodowicz, Henryk Andruszko, Jadwiga Rodowicz, Jan Bernad, Jan Tabaka, Anna Zubrzycki, and Mariusz Gołaj – the last of whom is the only actor of the original group continuing to work with the company. This configuration changed over time, adding performers such as Susanna Philhoffer, Dorota Porowska, Per Borg, Mariana Sadowska, and Marcin Mrowca, in addition to Piotr Borowski, who went on to work with Grotowski in Pontedera before forming Studium Teatralne in Warsaw, and Grzegorz Bral, who, with Zubrzycki, later formed Song of the Goat – the subject of the following chapter.

Despite the shifts within the company, a core of actors established and drove the development of the theatre alongside Staniewski. Dedicated to the work and to the group as a whole, these actors defined Gardzienice from the beginning as a social performing group. This was not simply through the actors' own shared interest, but through their collective

sense of investment, responsibility, and purpose. To refer to the first chapter, Gardzienice evolved as a social group bound together as a “*meaningful unity*” (Sorokin, 1962: 147).

Since its earliest days, Gardzienice has consistently attracted a diverse range of people from many backgrounds, with wide-ranging talents and interests. Maintaining anywhere between six and thirteen members over the years, the group was initially composed of “college students in their late twenties or early thirties and recent graduates in such diverse fields as philosophy, East Asian Studies, cultural anthropology, Polish drama, music performance, and engineering” (Filipowicz, 1983: 55). These actors were not only searching for a new way to explore the relationship between theatre and the surrounding world, but were dedicated to finding a more meaningful way of doing so. Staniewski explains that in the 1970s and 1980s

artists were permanently conscious of living in opposition to themselves because they were forced to sell themselves or bow to some kind of social order. In Gardzienice, however, we were totally liberated from all that. We were interested in the natural, organic way the villagers went about their daily business, their everyday rituals and ceremonies. As long as you can translate the distinctly theatrical element in all of these actions into the language of modern theatre, it can serve as inspiration. (Staniewski, 1998: 145).

By grounding themselves and their activities in the neglected rural areas of Poland – and signalling their intent by taking their own name from the village in which they had settled – the actors attempted to create a performing group that, like the villagers around them, was firmly rooted in the rich history and culture of the land upon which they lived.

### **Expeditions and Gatherings**

A fundamental component of the group’s early work was its expeditions, which became a driving force behind not only Gardzienice’s training, devising, and performance process, but the very life of the group itself. Between 1977 and 1984, Gardzienice embarked on what Staniewski referred to as the ‘Village Programme’, dedicating their work on

expeditions to small communities throughout Poland. While this period of expeditions did occasionally include areas outside of Poland, including villages in Italy (1979, 1981-1983), France (1979) and Lapland (1982), the primary focus was on the diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious communities within Poland.

Expeditions were conducted approximately once a month outside of the severe winter months, and could last anywhere from three days to two weeks. The first expeditions were close to home, starting with the villages in their immediate surroundings: Baranica, Bogusław, Zygmuntów, Antoniówka, Choiny, Nowiny Żukowskie, among others located between the larger cities of Lublin and Zamość. Over time, however, the group gradually included settlements further afield. By 1980, Staniewski and the actors had visited 45 villages from the region around Białystok at the north-eastern border with Belarus to Roma settlements in the mountains at the southern border with Slovakia. By 1984, the group had conducted over 100 expeditions all over Poland.<sup>55</sup>

Each expedition began with a reconnaissance, where one or two actors were selected by Staniewski to take an initial survey of the designated region. This included creating maps of the terrain, identifying villages to include in the expedition and particular people in each village who would help establish contact with the community. Reconnaissance also included identifying places to camp and areas particularly conducive for training and rehearsals along the way. Staniewski wanted to know:

How difficult was the route? What was the wind like? What were the natural sounds in the landscape? How thick was the forest? Are there any sheltered places? What is the settlement like sociologically?...Who are the people? (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 42)

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<sup>55</sup> Compiled from Tadeusz Kornaś (2004) op. cit., pp. 311-319; and from Gardzienice's website: <http://www.gardzienice.art.pl/en/wyprawy2.html>

This material was vital for the group to be prepared for the particular conditions and circumstances they might face during their journey.

Travelling as far as they could with a car, the group would then continue on foot, carrying what they could on their backs and hauling the rest in a large wooden wagon. Their approach on foot was due partly to the fact that many of the villages were difficult to reach with a vehicle. The actors would travel sometimes for days through mud or over ice and snow, up steep mountain paths and across rivers in order to reach their destinations. This had an added impact of creating an environment in which the actors had to work together in order to ensure their own survival.

Because so many of these villages were isolated from civilization, with little to no access to telephones, major roads, hospitals, or shops, the actors had to rely on their own resources. In an excellent first-hand account during an expedition to the Łemk region of Nowy Sącz in 1981, Filipowicz writes:

When you can hardly stay awake and your muscles ache from pulling and pushing the cart in the mud, and there is still firewood and water to be fetched and a meal to be cooked, your perspective changes; ordinary concerns and preoccupations vanish. You become more aware of your own selfhood, the other people, the surrounding space. As you open up all channels of perception and, at the same time, learn to conserve your energy, time seems slower and more condensed than usual. (Filipowicz, 1983: 60)

Because the group was on the road more often than they were at their base in Gardzienice (M. Gołaj, 2010), expeditions themselves were an excellent form of training, building not only physical endurance and stamina over often extremely demanding treks, but creating a strong sense of cooperation, patience, self-sufficiency, and care between the members of the group itself. Staniewski notes that the expeditions provided a means for the actors

to become more resistant psychologically, to develop a real sense of togetherness, to prepare you for what's to come. You've got to have a lot of stamina to overcome all the blocks and barriers when you face total strangers: bashfulness,



embarrassment, fear and anxiety. The strain of the expedition makes the group more hardened from within (Filipowicz, 1983: 59).

Travelling on foot was also important for Staniewski to ensure that the group would approach each village as simple human beings, with respect and honesty. In many cases, those whom the group encountered had never seen a theatre performance, let alone been in extensive contact with those outside their own community. As discussed earlier, government-funded researchers throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s had made their way into the rural areas of Poland, searching for traditions, songs and dances that would represent an idealized, homogenized conception of Polish culture. One important reason Gardzienice entered the villages on foot was to avoid “the possibility that the people of the village will interpret us as an official group which would be a threat to them” (Gardzienice, 1981b).

Presenting themselves to the villagers as actors, Gardzienice sought to engage with these communities through the songs, dances, and performance exercises that were a part of their own existence as a performing group. In describing the delicate process of entering a village, Staniewski asserts:

How do you identify yourself? Through your own song, you announce yourself as someone who is an innocent. Through this ‘concert’, you present what your sense of life is about, through your work. If you were a carpenter you would offer to do some carpentry; if a shoemaker you would offer to repair some shoes. If you were a trader you would offer some exchange but you are an actor, a singer..., so this is what you offer. (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 40)

This attempt to identify themselves through their work as performers clearly echoes the work of Barba and the Odin, although it is unclear whether or not Gardzienice’s approach has been directly influenced by the Odin’s barbers.<sup>56</sup> Both Gardzienice and the Odin seek to engage with marginalized, and largely isolated ethnic and cultural groups around the world through the sharing of songs, dance, and other customs. Equally, both

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<sup>56</sup> Both Cioffi and Allain refer to the echoes between Barba and Staniewski’s work. See: Kathleen Cioffi (1996) *op. cit.*, pp. 220-221; and Paul Allain (1997) *op. cit.*, pp. 107-111

hold an implicit function to challenge existing political structures – communist policies for Gardzienice, ‘accepted’, mainstream trends for the Odin.

It also must be noted that both are concerned fundamentally with questions of identity and with establishing an encompassing sense of belonging. It is within this final point, however, that the groups’ approaches diverge. The foundation of the barter is that of creating and asserting each group’s own identity as a group – a need entrenched in the Odin’s very structure since its earliest days. Gardzienice’s expeditions, on the other hand, are rooted in a desire to identify and celebrate disappearing multiplicity of ethnic communities within Polish culture: “learning more of the local culture, exploring and releasing the fundamentals of human creativity, and reviving trust and understanding” (Filipowicz, 1983: 56). As with the Odin, the fact that much of Gardzienice’s early work focused so intently on interactions with traditional and minority communities raises particular ethical concerns. These issues will be addressed after a more thorough investigation into the nature of Gardzienice’s expeditions.

When entering a village, Staniewski and the actors first would make contact with the person who had been identified during the reconnaissance, so that they may have assistance and support when meeting the other villagers. Together, they would then go from family to family, personally inviting each member of the community to an evening gathering. Filipowicz describes a scene from her participation in an expedition to Nowica, one of the Łemk villages in the Beskid Niski region that Gardzienice visited in 1981:

As we walk from house to house, the Gardzienice members, with their well-trained and powerful voices, sing songs from the region and then ask the farmers for local variations in the melody or lyrics. There is a moment of astonished disbelief that someone from the outside is genuinely interested in the local folklore. Then the farmers painstakingly search their collective memory for what once was a very rich culture, groping for songs that they have not sung for decades. We joke with the people, helping with the chores. We listen to the peasants' complaints about the government's repression of independent farmers and the growing economic crisis in the country. We hear the story of the Lemkos’ exile and return. (Filipowicz, 1983: 61)

In the evening, the actors and the villagers would gather together, either outside if the weather was kind, or inside the largest building in the village. Meetings could start slowly, beginning with the actors singing a few songs that the people might know and encouraging them to sing along in order to share different versions of songs, or add verses which the actors might not have heard. Over time, the villagers would slowly begin to join the singing, with one song sparking another one or bursting into spontaneous dancing; the room full of eager clapping as the actors and peasants encourage each other to continue, or surprised delight as the older peasants recall long forgotten memories of traditions, customs, and a way of life that was slowly passing.<sup>57</sup>

These gatherings involved mutual exchange, celebration, and harmony between two groups of people openly sharing their experiences and cultures. A vital component of this work was to create a level of understanding through which both groups could effectively communicate. As discussed in Chapter One, mutual understanding is achieved by identifying and creating a system of shared verbal, physical, and symbolic signs. In this case, while both the actors and the villagers often shared a common language, either Polish or Russian, the differences in their life experiences and world views were huge, with the villagers entrenched in generations of agricultural life away from the cities and modernization.

As a result, the sign systems of each group were rooted in their own very distinct sociocultural lives; as established in Chapter One, signs “carry the tones, colours, inflections and intentions...of the social groups and classes who use them” (Shevtsova, 1989c: 301). By asking people to tell their stories, trading information on current affairs,

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<sup>57</sup> Video documentation is invaluable in understanding these meetings. See: Jacek Petrycki (1993) *Towards a New Natural Environment for the Theatre*; and the accompanying CD-ROM to Staniewski and Hodge (2004) op. cit.

sharing complaints about the state of the country or fears of a hard winter, exchanging differing verses to the same melodies, and, most simply, by dancing, singing, laughing, crying, eating, and sitting together, Staniewski and the actors' expeditions were fundamentally about being present and sharing a small piece of life together. As Staniewski relates: "You have to be present totally and completely, without holding back even for a minute. You have to be able to listen and to respond. ...It is only then that a mutual giving and taking can occur" (Filipowicz, 1983: 60).

As with the Odin's barbers, there is scant documentation of the villagers' own responses to Gardzienice's visits. However, limited video documentation does provide an insight into the kind of effect such a gathering might have had within the villages. A documentary called *The Song is Over* (*Koniec Pieśni*) made by Borowski revisits villagers on Poland's eastern border twenty-five years after an initial visit in 1980 when he was still with the company. In an interview, an old man relates that there were once sixty-two people living along a single dirt-track road in his village; now there are only six. As he remarks, everyone has left or died – even the crows (Borowski, 2008).

While this example refers to the shifts in the rural population after 1980, it is indicative of the larger trend for these areas. By going out to meet these people, to listen to their stories, and to truly hear them, the actors sought to celebrate these unique ways of life in order to ignite feelings of community within these dying villages. A member of Gardzienice remarks:

When we return to the villages, we sometimes see changes in the people as they learn more about their heritage. Our presence seems to have acted as a catalyst for those changes. A farmer's wife might tell us with pride that the village people now meet regularly to sing together - something they haven't done for years. We also notice that the elderly are treated with more respect than before. Now the village sees them as a repository of the community's wisdom and tradition, not as a burden. (Filipowicz, 1983: 70)

This is, of course, an ideal outcome for Gardzienice's expeditions. Certainly not all expeditions went so smoothly, nor were so successful. Filipowicz provides an excellent example of an unsuccessful expedition when describing the group's visit to Bartne, a "larger and more prosperous" village with stronger connections to a bigger city. During this meeting, which, besides the villagers, involved some very successful local folk musicians, the actors found that the villagers were less inclined to contribute songs and, in general, were significantly more reluctant to participate.

During the gathering, the situation escalated when, in the middle of the actors' performance of *Sorcery* – a production that will be discussed shortly – an older woman interjected: "Don't get yourselves bamboozled!...They'll hocus-pocus you, blow off those candles, and rob you of every penny you've got" (Filipowicz, 1983: 69-70). For Filipowicz, this outburst reflected a wider pattern of social tension within this particular community. She observes that:

the response of the Bartne peasants has...revealed inner tensions and conflicting expectations within the community, which would like to protect its ethnic tradition yet at the same time yields it to modern urban culture. The arrival of the Gardzienice has rocked the delicate balance between the old and the new, or between the 'primitive' (the live singing or the pagan rite) and the 'cultured' (the [successful folk musicians']...recordings). (Filipowicz, 1983: 70)

This example indicates the difficulties and the required sensitivities when working not only with traditional or marginalized communities, but with any living community. As discussed previously, Staniewski and the actors of Gardzienice remained extremely conscious of the sensitivity required from them as artists entering these communities, and attempted to work as fluidly and respectfully as they could.<sup>58</sup> With the intention of meeting people as *people*, talking with them and showing genuine interest in their lives, stories, and practices, Gardzienice's expeditions sought to engage with diverse communities on a

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<sup>58</sup> Staniewski has in fact outlined strict rules for engagement during expeditions. For details, see Włodzimierz Staniewski and Alison Hodge (2004) op. cit., pp. 44-45.

human-to-human level. Despite this, it must be noted that – similar to the Odin – Staniewski and the actors, too, are the ones initiate contact with villagers and set the framework for the interaction.

Gardzienice's position, however, differs slightly from criticisms the Odin has been faced with. Most significantly, the actors were working primarily within their 'home' region. Although many of the communities with whom they interacted were not from the same ethnic background as the actors, there existed some level of cultural common ground between them – a shared language and shared historical context, if nothing else, created a space in which these groups could meet each other.

Additionally, a fundamental difference between Gardzienice's work and the Odin's is the way in which Staniewski and the actors were perceived by the villagers. As cited previously, the group entered a village "more like sons and daughters returning for a visit than like scientists" (Cioffi, 1996: 208). During her work with Gardzienice, Zubrzycki recalls that for the early production of *Sorcery*, part of her costume involved red and white ribbons plaited into her hair. She says:

I just sat down and the old ladies plaited them in. They took me on their knees and they would talk to me. They had never seen anything like it, and we had never been in a situation of such huge intimacy. There was no barrier because there didn't need to be one. (Zubrzycka, 2008)

Because of situations such as this, it is possible to understand that, in relation to Barba and the Odin's barbers, a more immediate feeling of commonality and kinship developed during Gardzienice's expeditions.

### **Early Training and Performance**

Besides their expeditions, Gardzienice also developed a rigorous training programme that emerged directly through the group's relation to the land upon which they were travelling.

Designed to increase stamina, release tension, and improve coordination, strength, and build a connection between breath with movement, Staniewski relates that

working with the body...is a form of health practice. ...[Morning] exercises should take place outdoors, in an open space, in relation to nature. It is not only a matter of breathing fresh air, awakening your body to life, unblocking bio-energy, or ultimately experiencing the joy of exercising together... It is a matter of energy, which is of a completely different nature to that experienced indoors. (Staniewski, 2003: 93)

When working together, the group would spend every morning running through tall grass and overgrown forests, along rivers and up hills, in order to awaken the body and prepare it for the day's activities. Working in pairs and with their surrounding environment, the actors would help each other stretch their bodies, lifting into headstands or pulling each other's bodies against tree trunks, gently rotating their partner's head, or massaging each other's backs and necks. Training would even happen during the winter months. Gregory's documentary shows the training one cold winter morning, where the actors were out in the snowy fields, wildly calling each other's names while they threw each other snowballs (Gregory, 1978).

Another aspect of the group's practice was night running, which continues to be a vital component of the actors' training. Running for two to three hours every night (ibid), each run would take the actors through dense forest or into open fields, where they would often run in complete blackness, with touch and sound as the only guide. Linking arms with one other person, or holding hands with the entire group in a long line, the actors worked to tune their bodies, breath, and rhythm to one another as they ran. Different rhythms were incorporated into the run, using both their feet and their breathing; for instance, taking two quick breaths in through the nose and two breaths out through the mouth in time with their steps, or taking two wide diagonal steps to the left, two small steps in the centre, and two wide diagonal steps to the right, at first slowly, until the group moves in unison enough to

increase speed, moving faster and faster before suddenly stopping, pausing, and breaking into a sprint to the end of a hill or across a field.

Trust exercises are also incorporated into the night running. Stopping in a particular field or clearing, one of the common exercises is for the actors to form small circles of approximately ten people. One actor stands in the centre, eyes open and hands on his or her chest, and relaxes, leaning into the circle. The rest of the group supports this actor with their hands, varying the speed, direction, and rhythm of movement as they guide the actor's body around the circle. Another example is an exercise performed while running. Forming a line two or three people across, the group will lift an actor into the air, with every member supporting his or her body as they maintain the rhythm of their steps. Night runs commonly end with a group exercise: four people simultaneously massaging one person stretched out on the ground; or forming a one large circle, holding hands as each person leans back with his or her head turned towards the sky before collapsing onto the grass to watch the stars. After resting for a few minutes, the group immediately gathers for late-night rehearsals with Staniewski.

Building their work from exercises such as these, the group combines their training with their own personal experiences of the people and the environments they have encountered during the expeditions. Staniewski refers to this as a process of 'naturalization', where the actors immerse themselves in the living contexts of the communities with which they engage – from gestures, inflections, hesitations, and laughter, to the very sounds of the wind, the water, the trees, and the animals of that particular region.

Naturalization, according to Staniewski, requires that each actor draw on these influences and experiences in developing his or her own craft; finding a way to embody



sounds and images such that they influence his or her own body of associations, movements, and memories. Staniewski notes:

There are any number of incidents that happen on expeditions, and I insist that the actors retain them. ....Life is not reality, which diminishes the arts - life is a magic reality which enriches the arts. It is simply a question of the ability of your fantasy to identify and transform it into an artistic opus. (Staniewski, 2004: 45)

While the group trains and performs during an expedition, both the training and performances have evolved from and have adapted directly to the individual environment the group encounters. Zubrzycki comments that this way of working “was like taking the inspiration and the energy of the performance from the earth” (Zubrzycki, 2010b).

During the group’s expeditions, the actors would not only share songs and dances, but would perform small scenes, acrobatics, or exercises on which they had been working. This material was arranged and adapted spontaneously for every gathering. Additionally, the actors might sing a familiar song but replace the words with fragments from Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve*, or combine a traditional dance with acrobatics from their own training. Gardzienice’s performances therefore developed directly through their interactions with these unique communities. Staniewski notes that in this process, he tried to ensure that the structure of the performance had

all the necessary structural values, tempo, dynamics, the appropriate impact which captures the audience. Is the form...unifying them as a common eye and heart? Or is it just dispersing them into many beings? If it doesn’t work I deconstruct it, rebuild it and try again. (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 55)

The ultimate aim was to create a performance whose essence was that of the voices, histories, and lives of those villagers they went to meet. The result were performances that showed elements of the peasants’ own every day lives in completely different contexts, entertaining, delighting, and even shocking the villagers. One older woman says the morning after a gathering and performance in her village: “I don’t know if I liked it, but

they were all very able and whatever happens, I'll remember that night all my life”  
(Gardzienice, 1981a).

Gardzienice's first performance was developed in 1977, shortly after the group had formed. Based on Staniewski's own exploration of carnival as a means of reversal and subversion against the social hierarchy of the state, *An Evening Performance (Spektakl Wieczorny)* was grounded in both Bakhtin's own study of the profane folk ritual of carnival and Rabelais' medieval text *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Drawing fundamentally from their own experiences during early expeditions, the actors created a performance that Filipowicz explains

speaks more to the senses and emotions than to the intellect and reason. There is no storyline or psychological development, only a quick succession of brief and dynamic episodes. The organizing factors are fast-paced rhythm and a dazzling interplay of opposites: serious and grotesque, spiritual and gross, lusty and pure. The mood shifts from facetious to solemn, cynical to sublime, ironic to affectionate. (Filipowicz, 1983: 63)

This particular performance was fundamentally 'of' the village. Premiering in the village Wola Gardzienicka, not far from their own base in Gardzienice, the actors blended elements of the gatherings they had undertaken into performative segments that shifted every evening, depending on the circumstances, the audience, the landscape, and the weather. If performing outdoors, flaming torches outlined the performance space, with a set that was composed of a simple white cloth draped over a rope stretched between two trees. There is little documentation of this first performance. For this reason, Filipowicz's first-hand account is particularly helpful:

Dancing orgiastically, the actresses bring in a huge straw figure – the *zmij* of Slavic folklore – and set its long, protruding phallus on fire. There is a gasp among the audience, quickly followed by another one when the actresses jump through burning wheels, the fire licking their long flowing skirts and hair. Occasionally, the actors run into the crowd hugging and kissing the peasant women amid shrieks of delight, wonder and excitement. (ibid.)

Using fragments of text from Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* and 'Bogurodzica', a Polish hymn thought to have been written sometime between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, in addition to songs and fragments of stories, jokes, and phrases the actors collected during their expeditions (Osiński, 1979), Gardzienice developed a performance that drew on the carnivalesque ribaldry and wild, mocking profanity of Rabelais texts, throwing the villagers into a world turned inside out. Osiński suggests that "it is best to approach this performance directly and straightforwardly, just like it is approached by the villagers. ...People in the country do not ask about the literary sources...They understand the performance in their own way - and that's it" (ibid.).

Their next performance, *Sorcery (Gusła)*, was developed in a similar manner. Premiering in San Pietro Alle Stinche outside of Florence during a tour to Italy in 1981, this twenty-minute performance again used texts from *Forefathers' Eve*, evoking the ritual of honouring the spirits of deceased ancestors. For this performance, Filipowicz outlines that "Staniewski has taken the central situation of the rite and a handful of spoken lines...intercut with additional Slavic folk materials, Christian imagery and elements of the Hasidic culture" (Filipowicz, 1983: 66-67). Unlike *An Evening Spectacle*, which focused most specifically on elements of carnival, *Sorcery* dealt with mystery, ritual, and magic. Once again, the performance was composed of images, pieces of text, and actions all linked together through a strong musical score of traditional songs from Belarusian, Ukrainian, Łemko, and Hassidic culture.

From the filmed stage version of *Sorcery*, it is immediately possible to detect that this performance should be viewed outdoors, with a blazing fire to light the stage. As it stands, however, the available film version takes place in a theatre. High platforms surround the edges of the room, underneath which the audience sits. Throughout the performance, these high platforms are used throughout the piece as an additional space for

the actors and musicians. *Sorcery* opens with the actors dressed as villagers, wrapped in shawls, jackets, and wearing heavy boots, trudging around the space on the floor in a circle while carrying a man over their heads, singing. Zubrzycki, as a daring, crude, and wild girl with ribbons in her hair, dances around the stage, whirling and twirling and she squeals in delight and beats butter suggestively before being chased off the stage by the ‘villagers’.

Another girl is in a trance, spinning and spinning before finally collapsing on the ground. She is then tossed into the air by the other villagers and put onto the ground where she dances in an ecstatic state, swinging her head and hair around in dizzying circles, arms outspread as joyful, rousing music is played on violin, flute, and guitar on the platforms over the audience’s heads, with the musicians occasionally coming down to join the actors for a particular song or action. A character wields a flaming torch. He is brought into the group by the two dancing women and forced to walk with the gaggle of peasants, made to crawl on his knees as he holds the torch. Jumps, flips, lifts are countered by embraces; intense, hushed harmonies and whispers are contrasted by harsh nasal tones, shrieks and bubbling laughter. The performance ends abruptly; the performers exit, leaving only a giggling girl who slips through the doors at the back of the stage, leaving the audience alone and in complete silence.

Like *An Evening Spectacle*, this performance contains a strong sense of the grotesque. With crude gestures, high, nasal voices, loud singing, the exaggerated, bawdy caricatures, boisterous singing and dancing, *Sorcery* is filled with lewd jokes and shrieks of laughter, screams, cries, howls, and wails. Drawing on Rabelaisian images of carnival and on medieval images by Hieronymus Bosch, Staniewski and the actors interspersed this wild energy with quiet solemnity. The actors capture moments where the harsh elements of everyday life become elevated to mean something much larger than they do in their original context. Staniewski explains: “Through the sounds of existing indigenous cultures we are

able to retrieve the sounds of ancient cultures, come closer to ancient myth” (Staniewski, 2004: 47) and therefore, he implies, to a more profound understanding of human life.

### **Mutuality and Musicality**

Beginning with these first performances, Gardzienice has created work that consistently attempts to transmute the qualities of traditional life into art by blending everyday customs, gestures, and phrases with the aesthetic and technical world of the actor. This process matured in the early 1980s as the group refined its training to enhance the connections between the natural world, the communities they visited, and their own physical and vocal explorations.

A unifying theme for the group throughout its entire body of work has been its heavy reliance on music. While Gardzienice has consistently focused on folk songs and musical traditions, often meeting with musicians from different regions in order to learn more about their unique musical forms and traditions, Staniewski has attempted to move beyond music in order to establish a performance’s ‘musicality’. While music maintains a structure and composition rooted within its particular culture and history, musicality is a matter of variation and human elasticity within the music, relating to the spontaneous and often unconscious expression of emotion tied directly to the inner life of the musician – or performer. In a particularly clear explanation of the difference between music and musicality, Staniewski explains:

the interest lay not so much in the stories or the melodies we were looking for in our expeditions, as in the sounds which lay behind these – the sounds of momentary pain, an unwillingness to sing, the repetition of strange noises which prevented a person from starting to sing, all the sounds of breathing which say so much about the sounds inside of one. In the villages here, this inner music is still a very strong base of self-expression. Upon this base come the melodies, for better or for worse. (Staniewski, 1993: 18)

This understanding of the musical qualities of human expression can be supplemented by the theories of Andrew Bowie, who summarizes the work of nineteenth-century Romantics such as Rousseau and Herder and examines the Romantic concept that music itself is the root of language. As Bowie explains, language is

what characterises us as human beings. As such, language must be able to express all dimensions of human existence. If responses to the world in early human societies are primarily based on pleasure, pain and fear, it follows that language will be primarily affective. Language in its early forms was therefore thought of as closer to what we encounter in the expressive form of music, rather than to the classifying referential aspects of verbal language. (Saul, 2009: 246)

For Staniewski, musicality is what it means to be human: if we are in tune with the world around us, we are able to express ourselves honestly. He elaborates: “The earth is musical and man is musical. ...But when the strings of man's musicality break, he dies. And when the strings of the earth's musicality break, the earth dies” (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 63).

The ultimate goal for Staniewski has therefore been to find a natural state in performance where every sound is connected seamlessly to another; where the rhythm of an actor walking across the stage interplays with the lyrical harmonizing of the other actors, or the sharpening of knives, as in Gardzienice’s more recent production of *Iphigenia at A...* where this sinister sound actively supports the actors as they move across the stage, maintaining the energy and balance of the production as a whole. Musicality is not, however, only a matter of producing emotional sounds. In fact, it is a process of allowing every sound to inform every other sound mutually. Referring to this as *harmonia prima*, Staniewski says that “certain sounds purify, bring catharsis... Once you reach this sound, you don’t have to do anything more! It is rather like the idea of the permanent idealistic unity” (ibid.: 72).

The intention behind musicality is to create an approach to performance that encompasses moments of uninhibited expression, and that works in accordance with these moments while still giving them space to develop and infiltrate the story as a whole. Focusing on the voice and breath, Staniewski works with the actors to uncover their own distinct body of sounds, accessing and stretching their own vocal ranges, breath, qualities of tone, and natural resonances. Training might also include composing a vocal score from each person's unique sounds; entering into a musical dialogue with another person or an instrument; exploring harmony and dissonance, and learning to meet other voices either by matching or consciously opposing their tone or pitch. Other exercises include weaving an existing musical score with other elements of musicality, such as another sound, a whisper, or an action; exploring voice with relation to a choir; or continuing a song within the body even if no sound is made (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 69-71).

As this last example indicates, Staniewski's concept of musicality also extends to the body, blending sound with action, gesture, text, and dance. Referring to this integration as 'mutuality', Staniewski trains the actors to find ways in which to meet each other, both physically and vocally, as they come together in tone, quality, pitch, speed, and grace. This does not have to be in agreement or in imitation of each other. Mutuality means simply that the movements are somehow in relation to one another and respond to each other. The mutuality exercises begin with the simple act of two people entering a space, meeting, and leaving. During this short encounter, the performers attempt to acknowledge whatever may exist between them, and allow it to develop through an exploration of touch, sound, gesture, or movement, and find a natural ending.

In explaining the basic mutuality exercises, Staniewski says that two actors must first meet each other in the space without anticipation. Keeping the energy in the centre of the body with the head, arms, and hands relaxed, they first touch back to back, shoulder to

shoulder, or face to face, slowly learning to respond to each other and becoming aware of what possibilities there may be between them. This process may eventually be expressed in lifts, flips, rolls, turns. However, the essence of the exercise is to be sensitive to the other actor's process as the pulse move through his or her body. It is important to not rush or force anything. Staniewski again describes:

One actor sculpts their partner's body while they respond in one sense as if they are asleep, in that they move only in relation to the strength of your touch. ...The actor forms the partner but it doesn't mean that the partner is helpless or without any will. They are dancing the same dance. ...Every touch causes movement. Every action causes a reaction. (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 81-82)

By combining such exercises first with audible breathing that responds to the movements, and then allowing this to develop into sound, he notes that the actors are able to create much "more complex imagery" (ibid.: 82). This leads to what he refers to as 'polyphonic movement', where actions, gesture, response, text, and music all act simultaneously, mutually informing and directing each other.<sup>59</sup>

An example of another basic mutuality exercise is also between two partners: one actor touches the other at the shoulders, head, elbows, knees, back, or belly. The actor who has been touched allows that touch to reverberate through his or her body. This is an exercise that has carried over into Song of the Goat's work, as will be shown in the following chapter. In Gardzienice's work, this exercise instigates a unique sequence of actions, rhythms of breathing, glances, and sounds as the two actors develop their movements in response to each other.

To illustrate this exercise, Gołaj and actor Joanna Holcgreber have created a sequence that has become a fundamental teaching tool for Gardzienice's workshops. Coming from opposite sides of the stage, the actors meet each other in the centre. Gołaj touches Holcgreber at the solar plexus, from where the impulse passes through her entire

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<sup>59</sup> The term 'polyphonic movement' was used by Staniewski during the August 2010 KOSMOS Workshop in Gardzienice.



body, moving her hips, spine, neck, and head. As the touch impacts her body, pushing her hips backwards, Gołaj follows the movement, coming behind her so that she can sit on his knee.

He takes her head in both his hands to stabilize her body, and then gently pushes on the centre of her back, moving away from her as the touch creates new movement. He comes back to her and touches her in the centre of her body, again in the solar plexus, which drops her weight backwards. He guides her slowly to the ground. Once she is sitting, Gołaj gently pushes her knees so that she spins in a circle on the floor, all the time guiding her so that she spins softly. He then lays her down on the ground and walks away. Coming back into the space, he lifts her up by grabbing her hand, bringing her to her feet as she feels the pull through the base of her spine, allowing the pull to take her body in the direction it wants to go. Gołaj brings her to his side and holds her firmly. Once she is stabilized, both actors walk away from each other, starting with the centre foot.<sup>60</sup>

As Holcgreber points out when teaching the mutuality exercises, the work focuses on listening not only to your partner, but on everything around you – both human and non-human, she says. By listening constantly, the basic form of entering the space, meeting another person, following the energy, actions, and sounds that emerge, and then leaving, provide an infinite space for new possibilities, stories, images, and actions.

In one variation of the above sequence filmed in Michał Tarkowski's documentary, *Lifelines of Body, Lifelines of Voice* (2001), Gołaj moves away from Holcgreber after he has pushed into her solar plexus. As the pulse takes her torso forward and her bottom backwards, he struts forward with his hands outstretched, gesturing that he is holding her bottom. Seeing this, she sighs with delight and surprise as she brings her hips forward. The

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<sup>60</sup> This exercise was taught during the KOSMOS Workshop in August 2010; however, a version of it has been documented in the CD-ROM accompaniment to Staniewski and Hodge (2004) op. cit.

action has taken the tone of a sexual courtship.<sup>61</sup> Staniewski notes that, through these exercises, all of the actors learn to “read the other being. ...[You are] words from the same book, ...two parts of the same poem” (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 75).

Despite the lack of logical narrative in Gardzienice’s performances, mutuality refers to one of the most basic forms of story-telling: what happens when two people meet? By framing the work with an entrance and exit, Staniewski searches for the gentle theatricality that exists between two people and the evolution of their own unique method of communication, using verbal and physical signs to explore the possibilities that lie between them at every moment. In a sense, this work is a matter of searching for simple identification and understanding between people – the truth told about two people as they discover for themselves who they are in relation to each other and what their own unique story is. Staniewski notes: ““We are asking...can the language of the body be the language of a dialog? Can it evoke allegories? Can it create content?”” (Filipowicz, 1987: 143)

There are strong similarities between the training of Gardzienice and the Odin. Both Staniewski and Barba are interested fundamentally in the theatrical form as a means through which to communicate with others. With elaborate costumes, exaggerated facial expressions, and heightened physicality, their performances are highly theatrical. Additionally, however, both have made a point to develop a training that is based on the actors’ own unique bodies, movements, and sounds. Barba has perhaps made a more

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<sup>61</sup> Overt sexuality in Gardzienice’s work is quite common, be it between a man and a woman, only men, or only women. This can be seen throughout the group’s performances, specific recent examples include a scene from their 1997 production of *Metamorphoses, or The Golden Ass: A Theatrical Essay*, based on Apuleius’ book *Metamorphoses, or The Golden Ass*, featured two men in togas, straddling each other tightly while sitting on a barrel and delivering text. Later in the same production, Gołaj alternately stretches himself along the length of a pole, referencing the crucifixion of Christ, and suggestively holds the pole between his legs, the symbol of a giant phallus. Women dance bare-breasted on the darkened stage, as in *Iphigenia at A...*, and *Elektra* ends with Gołaj stripped naked as he disappears in the shadows. Despite this level of open sexuality, it must be noted that the work most certainly falls within a particular masculine-dominated gender bias. As Grossman points out when discussing theatrical analysis and reception in Poland, because elements within the wider discourse are “historically and politically determined, they are therefore male-centred and ignore the aesthetics and needs of female-centred readers/spectators” (Grossman, 2005b: 105).

pointed effort to base his training on this, relying on his 'auto-didact' actors to develop their own personalised training and to teach each other. Staniewski, on the other hand, has focused strongly on the lives and traditions of other people for inspiration, in addition to external influences in nature, using these as reference points for the actors of Gardzienice to explore their own responses to the material.

This being said, however, both have attempted to explore the natural abilities and skills of the actors themselves through movement, training them to be themselves in their most natural form. As Staniewski says:

this training is always between two people *as they are*. They read each other and create through each other forms, moves, turns and bows. You can achieve very refined, even acrobatic results with mutuality but this training is based on how the person is. For example, take Mariusz Golaj. *His* body, *his* tempo, *his* ability, *his* potential. I deposited this exploration of mutuality with Mariusz and his partners. Over the years they were just themselves, but they developed something that was particular to the characteristics of their own bodies. (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 75)

Ultimately, what he is looking for is those same moments of truth he sees in the villages, where a spontaneous exclamation slips from the mouth of a surprised old man, or a woman sucks in her breath as she watches something with disapproval. These moments, for Staniewski, are not only living expressions of human emotion, but are pure theatricality.

### **Gardzienice in Performance: *Avvakum***

The group's training in mutuality and musicality began to solidify in their third production, *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum* (*Żywot protopopa Awwakuma*). Premiering in 1983, this performance was developed during a major political crisis between Poland and the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1970s, primitive living conditions, food shortages and rationing, endless queues, and severe censorship continued to dictate everyday life for the majority of the population. In 1980, ten years after the disastrous food inflation which cost Gomułka

his high-ranking party position, the government again raised food prices, escalating an already tense situation. Weschler explains:

There are the official price increases - cigarettes, for example, up almost 100%; a loaf of bread up 200% - but these provoke such resistance that the government tends to just leave prices as they are and let supplies lapse. To put it charitably, the government cannot afford to deliver products at the price that people demand and lacks the legitimacy to raise prices to a more realistic level; therefore, it simply stops attempting to meet the demand. People are left to scramble for themselves, outside official channels - in a market where their ration cards are useless and prices are seemingly without limit (Weschler, 1984: 52-53).

The situation escalated in Gdańsk, where 20,000 shipyard workers barricaded themselves in at the docks (Davies, 2005: 483). These workers demanded major reforms, confronting a government that had proven time and again that it would not hesitate to take severe action against such dissent. With strikes beginning in solidarity all over the country, these shipyard workers forced the government's hand and eventually, after seventeen days on the brink of disaster, the workers' demands were met. As a result, the Solidarity movement was born, establishing the only independent workers' union in the Soviet Bloc (ibid.: 482).

In just under a year, approximately ten million people became registered members of Solidarity (ibid.: 488-9). With Solidarity mediating between the workers and the government, conditions slowly eased, although food, goods, and petrol were still rationed severely. However, the workers' victory had lightened the mood in Poland; after decades, the workers had a voice and power of their own. Davies comments:

In this strange atmosphere, where political relaxation mingled with economic hardship, many of the restraints on cultural life collapsed. Publishers, theatre directors, artistic patrons, and film-makers found the courage to produce and to promote the sort of books shows, and events which the communist apparatus would never have tolerated in normal times. A demoralized Party establishment could not find the strength to stop them. (ibid.: 489)

This atmosphere of openness did not last, however. By the end of 1981, there was little productivity in the continuing discussions between Solidarity and the government, and few changes in the overall severity of most of the population's living conditions. With the

support of the Soviet Union, General Jaruzelski took command of the Polish government as Party Secretary and began to roll back the government's concessions to the Solidarity movement. This change of approach culminated in a surprise attack executed in the middle of the night on 13 December 1981. Jaruzelski declared a state of war in Poland and ordered the secret police to storm the homes of active Solidarity supporters:

Most Poles awoke on the morning of the 13th, to find tanks on the streets, army check-points at every crossroads, and the Proclamation of Martial Law (printed earlier in the Soviet Union) posted on every corner. In the course of the next week, most of the spontaneous protest strikes in mines, shipyards, and factories up and down the country were broken by mobile squads of the ZOMO police, operating behind army cordons. (Davies, 2005: 491)

On this night, tens of thousands of people were subject to arrests, detainment, beatings, and in some cases, death. Defeated, demoralized, and exhausted, people were forced to comply with whatever measures Jaruzelski deemed appropriate in order to maintain control. All unions were abolished, including Solidarity; curfews were put in place; all forms of public gathering were forbidden; and all was enforced by the secret police.

Those who had not been arrested went underground again; the revolutionary press started to publish subversive newspapers, journals, literature, and poems. The Church, which had managed to maintain a surprising level of autonomy throughout this period, began to provide an essential place for people to meet, hosting performances, cultural evenings, art exhibitions, poetry readings, and lectures by those who otherwise were restricted by severe censorship and suppression. Following the declaration of Martial Law, the majority of the nation's actors went on strike, refusing

to be seen on television or heard on the radio. Despite pleas and cash inducements from the Ministry of Culture, the boycott remained unbroken and Polish television in 1982 had to satisfy itself with reruns, panel discussions, and Soviet imports. (Cioffi, 1996: 147)

Although Martial Law was officially suspended in 1982, it was not lifted in actuality until 1983. Even then, severe restrictions remained in place; as Weschler comments, "most of the

principal features of martial law had by now become institutionalized into the civil code” (Weschler, 1984: 163). This was a situation that would largely continue until the collapse of the communist government in Poland in 1989, and the complete dissolution of the USSR in 1990.

Gardzienice’s production of *Avvakum* was developed during this period, responding to the situation by exploring Poland’s long and complex relationship with Russia. Because Gardzienice’s work was, on the whole, less explicitly political, however, critics of the group accused Staniewski and the actors of passivity towards the declaration of Martial Law. Kornaś writes that during this period, alternative theatres were expected to make a strong political stance. When Gardzienice refused to do so, they were criticised. He explains:

[D]uring the period of Martial Law, ...Gardzienice was accused of sitting on the sidelines, working on the play as if nothing had happened. These critics directly and very clearly referred to escapism, and even made statements about the group being completely cut off from reality... At this time there were weighty disputes concerning the theatre’s attitudes towards this [new] reality: should we stubbornly do the work, or loudly proclaim the injustice, the ills of every day life, the political restrictions and violence. (Kornaś, 2004: 85)

In fact, Staniewski had made a conscious decision not to make explicit politics statements regarding the declaration of Martial Law, or to chronicle, assert, or exemplify the everyday struggles faced by the population during this time. He argues:

We did not want, we were not able, we could not see the slightest reason to disregard the reality of man, because his true image, its dimension revealed the tension between the hopelessly degrading reality and metaphysical need. We did not look for our heroes either among the dead or in exotic cultures; we ourselves were the heroes of our own performance. We felt as if we were those who filled the streets, train stations, and the queues for meat. We had a deep and natural sense of communion and participation in the same fate. (Kornaś, 2004: 87)<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Staniewski uses the word ‘człowiek’ here, which can be translated as ‘person’. However, he continues by qualifying this with the masculine third person pronoun. For this reason, ‘człowiek’ has been translated as ‘man’. For more information, see Tadeusz Kornaś (2004), op. cit., pp. 84-93, particularly 85-87.

Staniewski and the actors opted for more metaphorical language, building their work on the seventeenth-century autobiography of a stalwart defender of Russian Orthodoxy, Archpriest Avvakum, who suffered endless trials as he struggled against the religious reforms incited by Patriarch Nikon that threatened to destabilize the Russian Orthodox Church. Nikon's reforms intended to realign Russia with the Greek Orthodox Church, which fundamentally altered codified religious practices, such as the sign of the cross, which was to be performed with two fingers instead of three, from those in which the people had put their faith.

For an illiterate population suffering widespread unrest as a result of a devastating plague and a series of military disasters, this was equivalent to devil-worship. As Brostrom explains: "Ritual was sacrosanct, the means established by God for communion with him. This being his unquestionable will, any effort to tamper with the ritual must have been conceived in the depths of hell" (Brostrom, 1979: 17). This led to a break in the Church, creating opposing forces of, on the one hand, Greek Orthodox practitioners, who were backed with increasing violence by Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, and, on the other, those 'Old Believers' in the ancient practices of the Russian Orthodox Church. Avvakum became a leader for the Old Believers, exiled to Siberia three times for refusing to bow to pressure from the Tsar, and thrown into imprisonment alongside three other priests who were similarly accused. They remained incarcerated for eighteen years, writing religious documents which were passed from village to village, before they were eventually executed.

Understandably, Staniewski found strong parallels between this story and that of the Poles' own fight for freedom of belief, expression, and, as he notes, "the contradiction between common duty and individuality within the system" (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 107). From the Tsar's own desire to create a vast Russian Empire to his appalling treatment

of the peasantry including the massive deportation of dissenters into Siberia – a familiar situation for many Poles throughout the twentieth century – Gardzienice used this text as a focal point through which to examine wider concepts of identity and history in Poland, with a particular focus on its long and challenging relationship with Russia.

As with the group's earlier performances, *Avvakum* was by no means a narrative portrayal of the text. Instead, the production sought to bring to life the world of the Archpriest in order to embody the fear, horror, anguish, pain, hope, and mystical reverence of this period. The actors therefore focused their research on the rituals, traditions, and everyday practices of Orthodox communities, in addition to cultures such as the Łemko whose customs have developed within the rift between the Russian Orthodox and the Greek Orthodox liturgies, therefore absorbing aspects from both faiths (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 108). Studying Orthodox iconography, in addition to the practice of liturgical singing that continued into the present day, the actors aimed to bring into relief Poland's own situation and relationship with Russia by rooting the performance in the opposing forces of mystical faith and chaotic brutality of this period of Russian history. As Staniewski notes, the performance of *Avvakum* "concerns *the heritage* of my soul, *the heritage* of my mind, my people, and my context" (ibid.: 106).

As with the group's earlier performances, traditional elements were combined with fragments from *Forefathers' Eve*, together with liturgical songs that had been collected during expeditions to the easternmost regions of Poland. There Gardzienice visited Orthodox churches and studied the iconography, analyzing representations of the body in these early religious art forms in order to incorporate this stylized physicality into their own performance. During this process, Staniewski and the actors identified a particular way of interpreting and working with the human body, where images of the spine could "yield allegories of human nature. ... Human nature is built on two positions – one, of strength



from the earth up to the waist, and, two, of nonpower, from the waist up” (Staniewski cited in Filipowicz, 1987: 143).

Continuing from the group’s earlier work, *Avvakum* still does not contain any definite narrative. Its structure is interwoven with shouts, cries, and wails, religious fervour and grotesque accusations. Scenes blend into scenes, marked by a shift in music and a flurry of activity on the stage as the actors move about the space in a group. They create living images in the low light of the performance, dropping their heads and contorting their faces dramatically with their eyes bulging and mouths stretched as in a painting from Brueghel, or drawing on the Orthodox iconography by standing in perfectly posed groups directly facing the audience; each actor at a different height, their faces and voices composed and solemn. Their work with the spine is apparent: in the contorted bodies of the peasants as they wail and moan in harmonies and dissonances and equally in the solid frames of those in positions of power.

The stage is scattered with candles inserted into the centre of round loaves of bread, which the actors carry around with them as they journey around the stage, lifting them into the air, rocking them in a cradle, or, in one instance, nursing them with a bare nipple. There are wooden spires and spokes, wheels and ladders, and props which seem to move by themselves; there are hands and faces, eyes, fingers, bells, books, and crosses. Bodies climb and crawl over each other; they leap and reach, with necks craned or heads sunk to the chest. The actors preach, belch, piss, scream, pray, laugh, and cry.

For all of the exaggeration, sharp tones and rough syllables, the actors contrast this with intense reverence and clear moments of hope, faith, and renewal. A woman rejoices, her head upturned as she is showered from above in what seems like heavenly rain. It becomes clear, however that she is standing under a urinating man. Liturgical chants begin

solemnly, issuing heartfelt pleas with strong, clear voices, before they collapse into bawdy, exaggerated, and mocking tones.<sup>63</sup>

The group's evolving work in musicality and mutuality is strongly present in this production. In an early scene from the version of *Avvakum* filmed for television, a group of actors trudge around the stage in a circle. Rodowicz carries the spokes of a wheel on his back, standing taller than the others. Those around him are peasants, hunched over and carrying loaves of bread with candles. Wearing heavy boots, they all stomp their feet in unison, calling "Save me!" ("Pamiłuj!") as a sharp voice wails over the top. At the end of a musical phrase, Rodowicz belts a "Hey, hey, hey!" which is followed by a scream. The singing and stomping pauses dramatically, with the silence broken by the rhythmic repetition of "Pamiłuj!", starting softly and building louder and louder, undercut with wails and laughter until Rodowicz again shouts "Hey, hey, hey!" and another scream and pause before the cycle starts again. Precise rhythm of movement and sound, timing, and the polyphony of voices builds the complex musical composition of this scene, a complexity that is interwoven throughout the entire performance.

This energy is contrasted with that of the fluid movement of the mutuality exercises. In one scene, Gołaj enters carrying Zubrzycki stretched out over his back. He holds her, suspended in the air, before gently lowering her onto a red cloth on the ground. She lifts up from her navel and reaches towards him, fluidly pushing him away from her as he shifts slowly backwards, the two actors operating as extensions of themselves. He stands and watches her as she lifts herself up and down, her neck and head following the roll of her spine up and down as if possessed, lifting her hands in the air and down.

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<sup>63</sup> Gardzienice (1990) *Zywot protopopa Awwakuma*, filmed performance, dir. Włodzimierz Staniewski, film dir. Magda Łazarkiewicz, VHS, 46'; and (1993) *Awwakum*, filmed performance, dir. Włodzimierz Staniewski, film dir. Marek Gracz, OTV Łódź: Poland, VHS, 32'

Through the strong use of this fluidity, interwoven and juxtaposed as reverence is followed with sacrilege, *Avvakum* finds a depth that the earlier two performances lacked. By incorporating images and gestures that were drawn from ritual practices of the Orthodox community, the group attempted to create a performance that was grounded in the reality of the beliefs and practices of living communities, but equally sought to separate these from their original contexts by embedding them in a completely new and theatrical system of action. Despite initial criticism surrounding this performance, over the years it has become one of Gardzienice's most acclaimed performances. Kornaś emphasizes this point, quoting Małgorzata Dziewulska, who wrote in 1987: "None of the images of Polish social fate that I have seen on stage that dealt with the apotheosis of the revolt and its martyrs, or the condemnation of the oppressors, held any of the strength of Gardzienice's *Avvakum*" (Kornaś, 2004: 86).

### **A New Context**

In the nine years between the premiere of *Avvakum* and the creation of their next piece, *Carmina Burana* (1990), Gardzienice's work gradually changed in response to a shifting sociopolitical situation in Poland. Martial Law lasted well into the 1980s before the eventual dissolution of the communist regime in both Poland and the eastern bloc. By the mid-1980s, it was apparent that the system was beginning to fail. In 1984, agents from the Ministry of the Interior murdered Father Jerzy Popiełuszko (1947-1984), a priest who had been an active supporter of the Solidarity movement. Because of an eye-witness, the agents were arrested and Jaruzelski issued a landmark order that "agents of the communist regime should answer in public for their misdeeds. ...Henceforth, no servant of the regime could be sure that the Party's shield of immunity was intact. A criminal regime had admitted to a crime" (Davies, 2005: 498-499).

In Russia, Gorbachev's appointment as Soviet General Secretary began to alter Soviet policy. For a time, the country was in a stalemate. As Davies states:

The existing system was unable to deliver economic success, and the illegal opposition was unwilling to consider political participation on the terms available. ...The Opposition was too weak to overthrow the regime, but it was still strong enough to prevent the regime from making any general progress. (Davies, 2005: 500)

In 1988, strikes broke out again as the Polish communist government sought to push through reforms that had no public support whatsoever. In a last attempt to bring the strikers back to work, the leaders of Solidarity were brought back in to negotiate.

After months of talks, which had been publicized on television – a landmark occurrence in itself – the parties finally settled on an impressive list of agreements. Solidarity was legalized and was allowed access to media, including the publication of its own newspaper; those discriminated against for their political activities were pardoned; arts organisations that had been outlawed were reinstated; and a large portion of the government was thrown open for free election, with the entire government to be open for elections in four years time. By the first round of elections in 1989, Solidarity had won over 90 percent of the open seats. In 1990, a capitalist economy was introduced, and Lech Wałęsa, the man who had led the Solidarity movement, was elected president (ibid.: 503-505). Although the effect was by no means immediate, this was the beginning of a new era in Polish history.

Gardzienice's first production in the midst of this massive transformation was *Carmina Burana*. Premiering in the village of Gardzienice in 1990, this performance was rooted in the understanding that only through significant upheaval can we begin to understand and value the true nature of love. Their performance was based both on the *Carmina Burana* codex of the thirteenth century, a collection of more than three hundred lyrical and often quite sensual poems about love, and on the medieval tale, *Tristan and Iseult*, and their tragic romance. Accidentally drinking a love potion meant for Iseult and

her future husband, King Mark, the chivalrous knight Tristan and the beautiful Irish princess Iseult enter into a passionate and uncontrollable love affair that pursues them relentlessly throughout their lives and into death.

Staniewski believed that this story reflected a societal shift – from pre-Christian practices into a more widely accepted and highly codified faith of the Church – and recognised a parallel with the drastic changes taking place in Poland at the time. He explains that *Carmina Burana* production became “an allegorical image of a human being in an age of transition. It is a vision of man suspended between two cultures (pagan and Christian). And so the Middle Ages became a metaphor of man's condition in our contemporary world” (Allain, 1997: 99). Gardzienice sought to examine the relationship between loss and love by creating a harmonious yet naive world that collapses in chaos and destruction, but nonetheless is survived by eternal love. Staniewski states: “I wanted the harmony and disharmony to be involved in the process of the work. The moment you are in dissonance is the moment when you are beginning to understand what love is” (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 117).

The actors built this juxtaposition of opposing forces into the performance through polyphonic singing, combining pieces from the *Carmina Burana* codex with Georgian music and songs arranged by Tomasz Rodowicz and composer Maciej Rychły. Accompanied by a chorus, the actors layered rich with the sounds of nature, from the soft gentle chatter of songbirds to the wild calls of bird of prey, with a constant underscore of pulsing drones and sharp, driving dissonances. Importing the characters of Merlin and his wife, the sorceress Vivienne, into the story, Staniewski portrayed fate as an active presence,

constantly guiding and maneuvering the lovers and King Mark, and exemplified by the wheel of fortune, prominently placed centre stage.<sup>64</sup>

In one scene, Vivienne crouches at the base of the wheel weaving a spell as Tristan lies at her feet in a large basin, his head visible just above the rim. Surrounding the two actors, all the others climb around the wheel in the dark, holding flaming torches and singing. The music is tense building towards something explosive and unforeseeable as the actors sing in escalating scales and intensity, bringing the torches closer and closer. All of a sudden, the chord changes, releasing the tension into a soft, loving, and forgiving music sung by Vivienne, accompanied by violin and flute. The scene dissipates, led by the flute twittering both high and low staccato notes and imitated by the actors as they chatter, giggle, and scatter across the stage like fairies.

Equally strong, however, was the overwhelming sense of profound and undeniable love between Tristan and Iseult as expressed through the mutuality between the actors. Played by Grzegorz Bral and Anna Zubrzycki in the original cast, Tristan and Iseult find strength, desire, anguish, pain, destruction, hope, torment, and joy in each other's arms. This is portrayed in a heart-breaking scene described by Kolankiewicz in his detailed account of the performance:

[T]hey meet and stop, showing the passion in their blood to each other with both look and touch. There is a short pause, a loud intake of breath and, like a surging wave, the melody returns. The Wheel of Fortune turns...and...we see the smooth acrobatic movements, frozen gestures, and entwining and separating of the lovers. ...Tristan and Isolde are like the honeysuckle and the hazel tree...nuzzling up to each other, embracing and entwining as if this will last for centuries. This is one of the most beautiful love scenes that one can see in the theatre. It is full of pure lyricism, both literally and metaphorically, full of movement and expressive gestures, harmonious rhythm, and enlivened by the pulse of the Georgian melody. In front of the enchanted crowd, as though in a heavenly love-chamber, the *mysterium coniunctionis* is fulfilled: the age-old mystery of two bodies joining into a single indivisible whole. (Kolankiewicz, 2004)

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<sup>64</sup> Gardzienice (1993) *Carmina Burana*, filmed performance, dir. Włodzimierz Staniewski, film dir. Marek Gracz, OTV Łódź: Poland, VHS, 40'

Rehearsals for this scene are recorded in Petrycki's 1993 documentary. During this preparatory work, Bral and Zubrzycki flow over each other with strength, fluidity, and grace. Bral holds Zubrzycki over his shoulder; she lifts her torso into the air like a bird. Bral then pulls her gently over his shoulder as she flips in the air and lands softly on the ground. He moves away from her and their eyes meet, she runs towards him and jumps onto his back, wrapping herself around his torso. He swings her around and lays her across his lap, lifting her into the air with her body outstretched. Releasing her, she runs off as he returns to the choir, only for them to come back to each other as if drawn by some powerful force.

Although *Carmina Burana* used material from the group's earlier expeditions into villages throughout Poland, the vast majority of the source material came from secondary sources from around the world. As Allain describes:

The...heterogeneity points to Gardzienice's wide travelings and the large number of foreigners who have visited them or worked with them during the creation of *Carmina Burana*. It represents a shift from village to city, from village dialog to Shakespeare, and from cultural specificity to multicultural diversity. (Allain, 1995: 111-112)

As expeditions became less and less of an active component of the actors' research, *Carmina Burana* signalled a major shift in the group's work. Already by 1994, Gardzienice had taken the bulk of its expeditions – over eighty percent of their expeditions, in the original sense of the word, were completed by then. Over time, expeditions became relegated largely to individual reconnaissance missions undertaken by one or two actors (as opposed to the group). Staniewski and Rodowicz travelled to the Zuni, Hopi, and Havasupai tribes in the southwest of the United States (1985); Rodowicz and Zubrzycki investigated Celtic traditions throughout Great Britain and Ireland (1987); Gołaj visited tribes in Australia, Tasmania and New Guinea (1990), and Staniewski himself researched

the running rituals of the Tarahumara Indians in Mexico (1987), the South Korean shaman practice of Ku't (1988), in addition to making a solo journey into Russia (1990).<sup>65</sup>

With the exception of Zubrzycki and Rodowicz's research of Celtic traditions – which contributed directly to the development of *Carmina Burana* – these later expeditions fed into the actors' and Staniewski's own personal development and research as opposed to the group's wider training and performance process. Allain provides interesting observations of an expedition to the Ukraine in 1993. He notes that during this particular expedition, Gardzienice no longer performed segments of any of their productions and no performance development work was undertaken. Instead, focus was placed primarily on the sharing and documenting of traditional musical forms. For Allain, the result was a “sense of the Expedition being an educational rather than merely experiential process, and the group's limited offerings led to an imbalance of cultural exchange” (Allain, 1995: 116).

His overriding opinion of this shift in Gardzienice's work following the fall of the Polish communist government was concern. He identifies international touring, increased fame, and easier access to the West, in addition to significant financial strain and reorganization within the company, as factors in an “artistic ‘dilution’ or lack of clarity in the company's direction (ibid.: 93). Specifically, the performance of *Carmina Burana*, for Allain, ceased to connect to the potency of the group's earlier working methods. He writes, rather dramatically: “Gardzienice seems to have crossed the boundary in a move toward the West and into so-called ‘higher culture.’ From such a place, there is no point of return” (ibid.: 112).

In a separate publication, Filipowicz responds to this statement, arguing that Allain's understanding of Gardzienice's artistic work limits the developing artistic practice

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<sup>65</sup> From this point on, ‘Rodowicz’ refers to Tomasz, rather than Jadwiga. He stayed with Gardzienice until 2003, before establishing Chorea Theatre Association, his own theatre company based in Łódź. Jadwiga Rodowicz left the company in 1991 (Kornaś, 2004: 323-326).



of the group and prevents it from adapting to a rapidly changing sociopolitical world. In her discussion of *Carmina Burana*, Filipowicz states:

the production refused the familiar polarization of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and instead explored what Edward Said would call, in *Culture and Imperialism*, ‘intertwined histories’: the experiences of ruler and ruled that could not be easily disentangled, even though a hard and fast line separated one from the other in matters of rule and authority. (Filipowicz, 2004: 169-170)

She continues in saying that, with *Carmina Burana*, Gardzienice has in fact “deterritorialized its creative work” (ibid.: 170). Instead of becoming transfixed in old paradigms dictated by a previous political system, she argues that Gardzienice has opened its borders for new influences, and a reshaping of its own artistic and social identity as Polish artists.

Filipowicz’s argument is vital in approaching an understanding of the shift Gardzienice’s most recent work has taken. Since *Carmina Burana*, Staniewski has moved into extensive historical research. He himself hints at this shift when discussing the principles guiding his research of this production:

We must not project contemporary thinking on to that time. That’s our colonizing way of being. ... ‘We shall say how those people should be living at that time!...’ That’s our *invalid* mentality. ... We must discover how mythology and history could project on us, and not the other way around. (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 118)

While these words echo his commitment towards the communities and cultures in which the group had based its earlier source material, this statement indicates his increased dedication to more historical influences. *Carmina Burana* thus marked the end of the first period of the group’s work, and acted as a bridge into the company’s current course as it shifts away from the voices and traditions of living communities and into a more concentrated effort to study the archaic practices that, in Staniewski’s evolving philosophy, are regarded as the core of our human existence.

In the mid-1990s, Gardzienice began to focus its research on ancient Greek culture, a path which has continued into the actors' present work, shaping their performances of *Metamorphoses* (1997), *Elektra* (2002), *Iphigenia at A...* (2007), and, most recently, *Iphigenia in Tauris* (2011). While this drastic change of direction may seem discordant with the group's earlier work, there are similarities; the most significant being the intention behind this investigation into ancient Greece. Staniewski has continued his search for the roots of theatre by moving beyond living communities that still practice their cultural traditions and going directly to the source in ancient Greek ritual. He explains that over centuries:

Education lost that which was most important for the ancients - in those times there was always art, because religion was art, ritual was art. Everyone was involved. The ancient Greeks inherited everything that came from the sphere of nature. They were in direct relation with this sphere which we alienate from ourselves today. (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 126)

This statement certainly echoes those in which he outlined his earliest work with Gardzienice more than twenty years before. In this sense, it's possible to understand the evolution of Staniewski's search, which still maintains its original dedication to reconnecting people with their past through the actors' own experiences and expressions of archaic traditions.

The group's most recent performances, such as *Elektra* and *Iphigenia at A...*, continue to be full of energy, shadows, grotesque gestures, masks, ecstatic wails, and orgiastic choreography. In this respect, it is possible to understand that the group is exploring a more archaic blend of music, movement, image, and story, drawing on ancient Greek tragedies to create performances that seek to harness the power of ritual and ecstasy. However, in considering the full scope of their work, Gardzienice's latest works face new challenges. By devoting so much of their efforts to uncovering ancient sounds, movements, gestures, and ways of worship, the group has broken away from explorations of real life as

it is lived now, creating performances that no longer emerge directly from living social material.

Their recent production of *Elektra* is a good example. Written by Euripides, this tragedy tells the story of Elektra and her brother Orestes as they take revenge on their mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover for murdering their father, Agamemnon. Addressing the moral dilemma of matricide, *Elektra* is a play that confronts the tragic decisions of a family fraught with guilt, revenge, sacrifice, and desire.

Gardzienice built their performance around a large body of images and gestures found in sculptures and in the surviving fragments of ancient Greek pottery, which they have incorporated into a gestural language. The actors call this ‘cheironomeia’, an ancient Greek term that refers to a complex system of hand gestures, symbols, and movements used for oration. These images range from symbols that represent the main characters, such as Elektra, whose pose is a body leaning to the left with a finger pointing to the mouth, to gestures for nouns like ‘day’ (two arms extended as the left arm swings over the head to meet the right) and ‘mother’ (two hands supporting the left breast). When put together, these symbols create a physical language.

In order to introduce the concept of cheironomeia to modern audiences, Gardzienice’s performance begins with a slide show, as the actors name and playfully enact each gesture or pose. The actors are highly skilled; their movements are full of energy and power; their voices strong and free as they call out the names of each image. Holcgreber is particularly adept at creating a smooth choreography from this complex gestural language, infusing enough energy and elasticity into each one of these static gestures to allow each one to blend into the other, creating a strange dance as an extension of the way in which she communicates with the audience.

From this point, the performance begins with scene followed by scene performed at a relentless pace as the actors cry, shout, scream, or laugh, tossing each other across the stage in seemingly wild flips, lifts, and turns. Wearing thin leather sandals and robes, the actors make use of grotesque masks – and for Clytemnestra alone, almost clownish make-up with red cheeks and triangles drawn onto her face for eyebrows – grabbing at each other's bodies as they construct their story out of this simple gestural language. Elektra, in revealingly torn rags, is dragged and tossed from man to man in scene suggestive of rape, as she pleads and cries to the gods. Clytemnestra's death is represented by an elaborate and precise fan dance choreographed by Kung Fu master Julia Bui-Ngoc.

In addition to the performance's strong physical vocabulary, *Elektra* is the first production that Staniewski has fully adapted from a dramatic text (Kornaś, 2004: 226). Like his earlier work, however, Staniewski has fractured the text, piecing together and rearranging episodes and scenes, which has transformed Euripides' text from a tragic tale into a wild, irrational frenzy, "capturing the imagination and leaving no room for rational analysis" (Niziołek cited in Kornaś, 2004: 227). The overwhelming sense from *Elektra*, and from all of Gardzienice's current work, is that of an explosive whirlwind, an encompassing performance that embodies a visceral world of sounds, images, colours, and emotions present in their understanding of ancient Greek theatre.

In essence, Gardzienice's most recent research reaches into the archaic tradition of dithyramb, which Aristotle described as a performance that combined rhythm, 'harmony' and song to greatest cathartic effect (Aristotle, 2008: 2). While the group's transition from the ethnic, cultural, and religious communities in Poland into the ancient civilization of Greece may seem drastic, Staniewski is still searching for the source of creativity and its profound connection with the rituals and practices of life. The ancient Greeks are simply

another, albeit significantly removed, example of a community that maintained their connection to the natural, spiritual and social worlds.

Besides this thematic and conceptual shift in Gardzienice's focus, something additional, and quite inexplicable, has changed in the group's more recent performances. As an observer of the group's work since 2006, and a researcher of the company between 2008 and 2010, I have had the opportunity to attend many performances of *Metamorphoses*, *Elektra*, and *Iphigenia at A...* both in Poland and abroad. Because of my limited grasp of the Polish language, my own engagement with Gardzienice's performances relies heavily on the musicality of the performance, rather than on the specific linguistic content of the work.

From this perspective, the power of Gardzienice's recent work, in comparison with all accounts of their earlier work, seems to have diminished considerably. Due to the protective environment in which Staniewski operates, balanced criticism of the group's work is not easy to uncover. However, according to testimony from educated observers, in addition to my own experience of the current performances, it seems that there has been a qualitative shift in the company's work – a shift that coincides not only with the company's changed method of work, but of the significant loss of long-term ensemble members within only five years during the early 1990s, including Bral, Zubrzycki, Andruszko, Porowska, and Rodowicz.<sup>66</sup>

The only indication I have had from other scholars regarding this issue has been through personal communications and in more informal environments – primarily from Dariusz Kosiński, who, during a lecture on Reduta and Gardzienice given to MA students at Song of the Goat Theatre, would only say that, since *Elektra*, he does not understand

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<sup>66</sup> For a list of the company's ensemble members of the years, see: Tadeusz Kornaś (2004), op. cit., pp. 323-326

what is going on with the company. His way of describing what he feels from the recent performances is a “lack of music” (Kosiński, 2009b).

What Kosiński confirms here is not simply that the performance is less *musical*, but rather that there is less *musicality*. The group has somehow lost a sense of the deeper human connections that had developed as a result of their earlier working processes. Within the framework of the present study, this alteration in Gardzienice’s work can be attributed at least in part to the methodological shift in the group’s research – from expeditions and gatherings with actual communities to more static historical research. No longer reaching into the cultural, artistic, religious, and social practices of living communities, the group instead engages more often with artefacts, images, and historical accounts in an attempt to revive artistic practices of a dead civilization. As Staniewski himself notes: ““In this our new work...we changed our philosophy, and we learnt music not from living people, but from stones”” (Allain, 2002: 113).

This is not to say that the group should not adapt its practice. Although the expeditions were a powerful mode of performance creation, blurring the boundaries between art and life, they were not a sustainable form of research. Kornaś writes that

the ancient rhythm of the expeditions from the 1970s and 1980s – more or less happening every month – was no longer possible to continue. It is easy to let your life become absurd that way – after 25 years of working in that way, you would have to do hundreds of them. How could you find anything fresh in that? (Kornaś, 2004: 94)

Additionally, as acknowledged by Filipowicz in her debate with Allain as discussed previously, the changes in the group’s work must be viewed within a broader sociopolitical context. Following the fall of the communist government in Poland, she argues that “Gardzienice is clearly entering a condition of borderless culture” (Filipowicz, 2004: 170). By moving into an exploration of ancient civilizations, the group is in a process of adapting and transforming their artistic practice in tandem with a shifting sociopolitical environment.

As a theatre company in operation for well over thirty years, this process of artistic reexamination and reformulation is natural. Gardzienice is searching for new experiences and inspiration for their work. Besides its research into ancient Greek civilization and ritual, the group has been focusing increasingly on education. While the company continues to research and devise new performances, a great deal of effort is now spent on their Academy for Theatre Practices.

Here, Staniewski and the actors train students to develop their bodies and minds into open channels for creativity. The students' training is built on Gardzienice's own historical approach to performance: meeting in Gardzienice for five days a month, these young actors practice morning training, acrobatics, mutuality and voice work, night running and organizational, administrative and maintenance tasks. They conduct their own research, attend lectures regarding ancient Greek uses of symbols, myth, and ritual, and learn to construct their own cheironomeia through the physical poses and gestures uncovered by the company.

A significant element of these students' training is the possibility of their gradual incorporation into the company of Gardzienice. Many students graduate from the programme and are invited to stay on, rotating into existing roles in the company's ancient Greek repertory when other actors are unavailable or leave to pursue different work. Staniewski's latest efforts have therefore become focused on creating a new generation of Gardzienice artists, feeding into the framework of the ensemble which has existed for so many years. In this way, Staniewski continues to build on the foundations he and a series of actors laid during a vastly different period not only in Polish history, but in his own artistic search.

This continued dedication is evident through the group's most recent endeavour, in which it was named a European Centre for Theatre Practices (Budowa Europejskiego

Ośrodka Praktyk Teatralnych w Gardzienicach) by the Polish Ministry of Culture.

Supported by the European Union, this massive project focuses on developing Gardzienice as a cultural, artistic, and educational centre. Many of the buildings will be renovated, creating a new space for the students of the Academy, a multi-media library, and a research institute that Staniewski refers to as the ‘Workshop for Close History’ (Pracownia Historii Bliskiej) which aims to serve as a centre for “renewing and restoring the memory of the traditions and nations that have contributed to the culture of this land” (Staniewski, 2011).<sup>67</sup> Additionally, Gardzienice’s new facilities will provide available spaces for artists’ residencies, international performers, concerts, and gatherings.

Construction has only recently begun – although it was halted for a time after an archeologist discovered an ionic column at one of the building sites – and for this reason, it is impossible to anticipate how this newest development will influence the group’s work in the future. However, for Staniewski, this centre signals a significant shift in the group’s practice. In his own words:

‘Gardzienice’, risen anew from ruins...from the idea that the way to practise humanism is not - as it was with Grotowski - an attempt to create a new man..., but the creation of a new natural environment for art. ‘Gardzienice’ so conceived will be a generator of new theatre undertakings. (ibid.)

Building a space devoted entirely to the exploration, development, and celebration of theatre as an integrated life practice, Gardzienice’s latest work has in fact followed a pattern similar to Barba and the Odin’s in Holstebro. Staniewski’s own attempt, however, has developed from the unique characteristics of Gardzienice, rooting its centre in the culture and history of the region in order to further promote the lives, traditions, and beliefs of the local communities. Despite the changes in Gardzienice’s practice, the group has

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<sup>67</sup> Translations provided for this particular interview were published anonymously on the Gardzienice website: <http://www.gardzienice.art.pl/en/prasa2.html>. For the original Polish article, see: Włodzimierz Staniewski, interviewed by Grzegorz Nurek (2011) ‘Ekstra polski Eurypides’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* Nr. 26 (3233), published 26 June; or online at: <http://www.gardzienice.art.pl/prasa2.html>.



remained, and seemingly will remain, dedicated to investigating theatre as an art form embedded in diverse ethnic, social, historical, spiritual, and cultural traditions.

## **Chapter Five: Song of the Goat Theatre (Teatr Pieśń Kozła)**

The third and youngest generation of performing groups analysed in this study, Song of the Goat Theatre was formed in 1996 by Grzegorz Bral and Anna Zubrzycki in Wrocław. As former members of Gardzienice – Bral for six years between 1987 and 1992, and Zubrzycki for sixteen, from 1979 to 1994 – the two have drawn on this formative experience to create their own idiosyncratic practice that seeks to explore the living connections that bind people to one another. Encompassing training, devising, and performance, in addition to performance research, pedagogy, social projects, and charity work, Song of the Goat has ultimately established an artistic practice that extends beyond the boundaries of theatre and directly into the social world.

The group's particularly strong sense of social engagement has much to do with Bral and Zubrzycki's own personal world views. As Tibetan Buddhists, they embrace the understanding that the world, as an interconnected whole, is in a continual state of impermanence. In order to alleviate the suffering caused by this, Buddhist thought teaches the practice of mindfulness and compassion toward every element of life so that each individual may live in complete harmony with the world.<sup>68</sup> Although essentially a part of Bral and Zubrzycki's own personal, spiritual practice, this understanding of the world has naturally informed their work with Song of the Goat; a relationship outlined previously in Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and Goldmann's *vision du monde* or world view. As

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<sup>68</sup> See Akong Tulku Rinpoche (1994) *Taming the Tiger: Tibetan Teachings for Improving Daily Life*, London: Rider; Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (2007) *Introduction to Buddhism*, Ulverston: Tharpa Publications

Zubrzycki herself acknowledges, “It is in us, so therefore it must inform the work in some way” (Zubrzycki, 2008).

In this respect, Song of the Goat Theatre is committed to the exploration of performance as an experience of interconnection and compassion; not as spiritual principles, but as a means through which its artistic practice is shaped. Drawing actors from across Europe, the ensemble has evolved as a performing group devoted to artistic practice as a life practice, where theatre is integrated fully with the social world. To this end, Song of the Goat focuses its work on the practice of ‘coordination’, which seeks to establish a harmonic balance between every element in performance. Underlying every component of the group’s work – from training, devising, and performances to the very way in which the group engages with the larger world – coordination is a defining component of the group’s habitus, shaping the entire artistic and social life of the group as a whole.

Practically, coordination means tuning to every person and every element in one’s surroundings such that a natural, honest, and connected response can develop. With this as the foundation for their work, the actors of Song of the Goat train and devise almost exclusively as a group, using physical, vocal, rhythmical, and imaginative exercises to slowly open themselves to each other. By improvising on top of a drone or rhythm held by the group, working in pairs to find the moment where neither person is a leader or follower, or moving about the space as an ensemble so seamlessly that every action, breath, sound, and gesture is heard and responded to, the actors attempt to follow the flow of energy in order to create a sense of complete harmony on stage.<sup>69</sup>

This work takes profound courage, patience, and perseverance as it demands that every actor is completely open and mindful at every moment during the group’s work

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<sup>69</sup> This and following information regarding Song of the Goat’s working process is compiled from personal observations between April 2007 and November 2010.

together. To this end, the training in coordination requires that the actors develop a deep awareness of themselves and their own internal processes – from the varying energy they may have on any given day to their physical habits and emotional or psychological blocks – and a sensitivity and compassion towards the processes of others. Embracing the understanding that each member inevitably brings their whole self into the space, *Song of the Goat* operates as an ensemble that consciously follows and builds upon the natural flow between people.

To do this, the actors explore diverse cultural and artistic forms that maintain a strong connection with the communities and cultures in which they developed. Understanding this material, and particularly music, as a “sophisticated tool...to self-recognition, to the soul” (Bral and Zubrzycki, 2006), Bral and the actors search for songs, rituals, movements, and texts that hold a natural ability to evoke visceral emotional and physical responses. The group has therefore explored Russian and Balkan lamentation, ancient Sumerian mythologies, polyphonies of Albania, Siberia, and Corsica, Greek ritual dance, rhythms from traditional Korean drumming, Greek and Polish parables, and Shakespeare for its various productions.

Integrating aspects of the actors’ own experiences of these forms into their own improvisations, traditional songs, dances, images, stories, and ceremonies act as a gateway for the members of *Song of the Goat*. Often travelling to remote areas of the world to meet the people who continue these traditions, or to experience the land which gave birth to them, Zubrzycki points out that this allows the actors to “tread through the landscape in a very literal sense” (Zubrzycki, 2008), and opens them to the language, musicality, tones, colours, and sense of these deeply rooted cultural traditions. Developing and building upon their own visceral responses to this material for each production, the actors carefully craft performances that integrate these diverse cultural forms with their personal experiences,

memories, imaginations, physicality, and tonality, creating theatre that attempts to exist as an honest and constantly evolving human experience.

As this suggests, coordination for Song of the Goat does not simply remain within the confines of the theatre. Maintaining a strong connection to people, tradition, belief, and nature is of vital importance to the group. In this way, the principles which define it as a social performing group extend beyond their artistic work and into the very way the group engages with the world. Accordingly, Bral and Zubrzycki have guided the group's activities to include educational, social, and charitable programmes which, together, shape a strongly social approach to performance in the attempt to create a wider experience of meaningful connection between people in the world.

An educational manifestation of this can be found in the group's own MA in Acting, based in Wrocław and run in conjunction with Manchester Metropolitan University. Through this programme, Song of the Goat trains young artists in coordination, providing them with an intense experience of the group's work through physical and vocal training and expeditions to places such as Greece, Siberia, and Spain. Guiding the students through the devising process by encouraging the exploration of their own creativity, Song of the Goat ultimately attempts to offer students an alternative understanding of performance in which theatre is a living practice of compassion towards the self, others, and the surrounding world.

On a distinctly sociocultural level, however, Bral and Zubrzycki are both involved heavily in the work of Swiss charity, Rokpa International. Meaning 'to help' or 'to serve' in Tibetan, the organization was established in 1980 by Tibetan Lama, Dr. Akong Tulku Rinpoche, and Swiss actress Lea Wyler in order to provide destitute people – and particularly children – with food, shelter, education, and medical support. With a strong presence in Tibet, Nepal, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, in addition to smaller branches

throughout Europe, Rokpa International has touched the lives of over 10,000 orphaned children in Tibet alone.

In 1995, Bral and Zubrzycki established the first Rokpa branch in Poland, which has organized charity work for the homeless and disadvantaged in Lublin, Wrocław, and Szczecin. Over time, their activities with Rokpa have become intertwined with their artistic practice. Registering Song of the Goat Theatre as a non-profit organization dedicated to both artistic and social endeavours (as Stowarzyszenie Kultury Teatralnej, which most closely translates to Cultural Association of Theatre), Bral and Zubrzycki have maintained an active presence in the Wrocław community, as they constantly search for new ways to reach out to the local community through theatre and music workshops, art exhibitions, and a variety of outreach programmes that aim to link members of the community together.

The largest and longest running project they have organised is the Brave Festival: Against Cultural Exile. Since 2005, this annual festival has brought together artists from communities who fight to preserve their cultural identity through their practice of traditional songs, dances, and ceremonies.<sup>70</sup> With the support of the Culture Sector of UNESCO, Brave invites people from places as diverse as Azerbaijan, Korea, Chechnya, Tanzania, and Pakistan, with the intention to provide an international platform in which people of different cultures and traditions can celebrate each other's cultural heritage in an environment of diversity, respect, and compassion. Focusing on a new theme each year, from music, ritual, and prayer to the power of the word, Brave Festival incorporates performances, public forums, open rituals, artist meetings, late night dancing, parades, exhibitions, films, and active charity work in order to introduce new ways of engaging with the world.

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<sup>70</sup> See also: Murray Edmond (2008) 'A Saturated Time: Three Festivals in Poland, 2007', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 96:4, pp. 307-321

In recent years, the festival has expanded its efforts in order to give children this same opportunity. Run alongside the major festival, Brave Kids invites children from arts organizations and charities in third world countries such as Nepal, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Rwanda, in addition to destitute and marginalized children living in Poland, in order that they may meet each other, play together, and learn from each other. Working together for close to two weeks, the children combine their unique cultural traditions to create a single, unified performance that is then presented at the Brave Festival Finale.

Song of the Goat has therefore developed its artistic practice as a life practice, striving for a balanced presence in the world through mindfulness, respect, and compassion. For Bral, the essence of connection to each other, our communities, and nature lies in the living traditions of song, ritual, prayer, dance, myth, and other cultural forms that bring people together through a shared sense of identity. Contributing to a community's collective consciousness, as outlined by Durkheim and discussed in Chapter One, this material contains an intrinsic "*social act*, ...that symbolically binds the individual to his kinship community" (Nisbet cited in Durkheim, 1976: vi). By rooting every human being to the world around him or her, these cultural, artistic, and spiritual traditions are the link to our very humanity.

Fundamental to Song of the Goat's work, however, is Bral's belief that these traditions are rapidly being abandoned. He asserts that, "by the slow process of civilization, we are losing the connection" (Bral, 2010b). As a result, both he and Zubrzycki have shaped their life's work in the attempt to honour the power within these forms, and to give them voice so that they – and the communities who practice them – may continue to survive. Weaving their artistic vision with education, charity, and active social engagement, Song of the Goat has evolved as a group committed to an artistic practice where theatre

itself creates the means through which people may meet each other in a relationship of mutual understanding and compassion.

### **The Development of Coordination**

While Song of the Goat's approach to performance undoubtedly continues the socially driven artistic legacy in Poland, the most direct influence on Bral and Zubrzycki's work with Song of the Goat has been their close relationship with Gardzienice – with their work in mutuality, musicality, gatherings, and expeditions contributing to the foundation of Bral and Zubrzycki's own developing practice.

Zubrzycki first came to Gardzienice following a series of workshops with Grotowski and his actors, Rena Mirecka and Ryszard Cieślak, in the 1970s. Excited by Grotowski's experiments in paratheatre but feeling the work too "esoteric" (Zubrzycki, 2009), Cieślak referred her to Staniewski, who had recently left the Laboratory Theatre and was just beginning his work with Gardzienice. After travelling on an expedition to the Polish-Soviet border with the group, Zubrzycki became a member of Gardzienice in 1979, working alongside, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Gołaj, Andruszko, Wróbel, and both Tomasz and Jadwiga Rodowicz, among others, on *An Evening Performance*, *Sorcery*, *Avvakum*, and *Carmina Burana*. In 1987, Bral himself joined the company, and performed in *Avvakum* and *Carmina Burana* before eventually leaving in 1992, followed two years later by Zubrzycki.

For both performers, the work with Gardzienice was hugely influential, particularly for Zubrzycki, who was with the company for close to seventeen years. As she relates, her first experiences with Gardzienice's work triggered a

huge, true emotional response. I thought, 'Finally, something that makes sense in the theatre world for me'. The training was great; it was very spontaneous. We were travelling to villages and researching songs and really learning on the spot. It



was very challenging because you had to be yourself completely; you had to be very open as a performer and very clear in how you did that, otherwise people [in the villages] got bored. They started talking or smoking, or turned away because they had never seen theatre before. (Zubrzycki, 2009)

Searching for a ‘natural environment of the theatre’, Staniewski and the members of Gardzienice shaped an understanding of theatre as a life practice. As discussed in Chapter Four, their activities included everything from intensive physical training, singing, acrobatics, and meeting with villagers to necessary administrative tasks, maintenance work or helping out the neighbours; the actors simply lived their work. For Zubrzycki, this period was “so strong, so human, so special”. As she continues: “We weren’t fantastic actors then, but we were completely engaged. And, in a sense, it was that simplicity which provoked such a strong response in the audience; the simplicity and the humanity, which I think was just radiating through the work” (Zubrzycki, 2010b).

This honest, human approach to performance eventually became the backbone of her later work with Bral. After they left Gardzienice, Bral and Zubrzycki began leading workshops in various universities and drama schools throughout Europe, drawing on their training in mutuality and musicality as they began to develop their own approach to working with actors. These workshops, however, were not a means to continue the work they had done with Gardzienice; instead Bral and Zubrzycki found themselves slowly building on their previous experiences as they followed their own interests. Most importantly, Bral discovered during these early workshops that the exercises he was leading changed and evolved as they responded to the relations within each unique group. It is this realization that would eventually become the foundation of coordination (Bral, 2009).

The development of coordination, however, happened over time. At the beginning, Bral and Zubrzycki’s early work was still very close to Gardzienice. In 1996, the two were offered a residency at the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław, where they developed their first,

and eponymous, production, *Song of the Goat – A Dithyramb* (*Pieśń Kozła – dytyramb*). Premiering in 1997 and with reference to the Greek for ‘tragedy’, or *tragon ode* meaning ‘goat song’, *Dithyramb* sought to harness the ecstatic energy of the ancient rituals offered in praise of Dionysus. These rituals were driven by dithyrambic poetry, which – as discussed earlier with reference to Gardzienice’s work – blended music, movement, rhythm, and song releasing into catharsis. Building upon this artistic form, Bral notes:

Since we realized that the viewer might experience the performance on various levels, we have been trying to use these tools in order to activate different levels of perception. The actors switched from gesture to song, from dance to words, and so on, not dropping the narration on the text level. The Greek actor used the method of polyphony on different levels of the play. (*Song of the Goat Theatre*, 2010)

With energy levels matching those demanded of Gardzienice actors, the actors wove text from Euripides’ *The Bacchae* with Balkan polyphonies with pounding rhythms, incantations, fire throwing, and ecstatic dances to create a performance that Bral describes as “wild, young, passionate; not really theatre – just a moment of explosion” (Bral, 2009). What emerged during this period was an approach to performance that relied on the full capabilities of the actor, incorporating movement, voice, rhythm, gesture, emotion, imagination, action, and text, partnered with a strong commitment to the natural human to human contact present in any ensemble work.

While these elements share a strong parallel with Gardzienice’s work, it was Bral and Zubrzycki’s own personal world view that eventually led them towards a more idiosyncratic approach to performance. In this respect, their work with *Song of the Goat* has been largely inspired by their own spiritual practice as Tibetan Buddhists. A fundamental component of Buddhism is the concept of interconnection, which suggests that every element in the world influences and responds equally to every other element. This suggests a world in constant change, existing in a permanent state of impermanence. Rinpoche, as co-founder of Rokpa and as a spiritual teacher to Bral and Zubrzycki, explains that this

impermanence not only “pervades all of the outer world and all our inner experience” (Rinpoche, 1994: 23) but can be seen everywhere: in nature, through the change of seasons; and in life, through our shifting emotions and moods, physical and mental development, birth, maturity, and inevitable death.

As a result, human experience is underlined with suffering as individuals try to cope with the innate lack of stability surrounding every aspect of their lives. According to Buddhist thought, however, every individual has the potential to adapt positively to this impermanence. Through the practice of mindfulness, each person may attain a sense of harmony with the world by coordinating their own internal existence with the external world. This sense of coordination is simply finding a balanced way to engage with oneself and the surrounding world. Rinpoche outlines this concept by saying that an individual must attain this sense of peace in order to be actively and positively engaged with the world. He specifies:

The sense of help is to give co-ordination (harmony), you become helpful, you are no longer useless. The most helpful is that you are always co-ordinated whatever is happening, co-ordination with your friends, within yourself, with the environment. Because our problem is that we don't co-ordinate, we don't listen to things, we don't understand the motions or expressions that people present to us. We don't take the time to think or want to understand. ...[C]o-ordination [is] how to understand and how to overcome all these difficulties. (Rinpoche, 1996)

Because everything is understood to be interconnected, Buddhism believes every emotion, thought, word, and action resonates in the larger world. In order to establish coordination, negative states such as fear, anger, judgment, and prejudice must be dissolved in order to learn to accept the suffering caused by impermanence. It is therefore vital for individuals to treat themselves, and every other living being, with “unbiased compassion” (Gyatso, 2007: 80). With our own actions influencing those around us, compassion has a residual affect on the world around us, coordinating ourselves with everything that is around us. In this way, Rinpoche writes that this compassionate understanding “of the

world and of the people around us and of ourselves too” will then “radiate out to one’s family, one’s society and even to whole nations” (Rinpoche, 1994: 1-2).

It is this sense of compassion that lies at the heart of Song of the Goat Theatre. Although a fundamental component of Bral and Zubrzycki’s own personal, spiritual beliefs, this particular sense of social engagement has undeniably shaped the development of their work with Song of the Goat. Zubrzycki acknowledges this, saying that “this sort of theatre sources who you are and how you understand the world. When you devise a company and you devise work, you have to source yourself” (Zubrzycki, 2008). Song of the Goat has therefore evolved as a performing group deeply committed to a compassionate practice that maintains a positive presence not only within the group, but with its community and the wider world.

Drawing actors not only from Poland, but from Finland, France, Norway, Sweden, and the UK, Bral specifically focuses his work on the concept of ‘coordination’, which, in an artistic context, attempts to establish harmony at all levels of the group’s work – between every person, emotion, thought, action, voice, word, sound, setting, and so on – so that they may create a meaningful and profound experience of interconnection with the audience during every performance. He explains that “your imagination, your voice, your movement, your rhythm, your dynamics – they all have to be interconnected because there is a direct flow of energy between how you think, how you speak, how you intellectually behave, and how you move” (Bral, 2009).

Coordination, for Song of the Goat, therefore begins with the training of the individual actor as an integrated whole. Using physical, vocal, rhythmical, and imaginative exercises, the actors search first and foremost for a balance between their bodies, minds, and hearts in an attempt to open themselves to honest connections with others. Bral

specifies that the training in coordination is fundamentally “a profound actor training that teaches a person to become a sensitive, open, and honest instrument” (Bral, 2009).

Under his guidance, the actors travel deep inside themselves, following their own memories, experiences, emotions, sensations, and their imaginations as they begin to break down barriers that may prevent them from opening honestly to one another. Actor Ewan Downie explains that this is a process of learning how to “access the shadow parts, the parts you deny” (Downie, 2010a). As Zubrzycki notes further, it is a process of “stripping themselves bare...to find the truth of every moment” (Zubrzycki, 2010a).<sup>71</sup>

An example of this is an exercise referred to as ‘touchings’, where an actor stands open and relaxed while another pushes gently on different parts of his or her body. Feeling the sensation, the actor receives the physical impulse and allows it to have space in the body as it resonates in a wave of movement. Very similar to Gardzienice’s mutuality exercise, Song of the Goat uses its touchings exercise to activate and connect to an emotion, a gesture or action, sound, song, a single word, or section of text (Salonen, 2010). Alternately, the actors play games. For example, rehearsals for the group’s 2008 production of *Macbeth*, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, often included wild games with a ball, which jolted the actors awake and forced them to respond quickly and instinctively without questioning their decisions.

Exercises and games such as these help the actors to open the channels within their bodies so that they may find access to deeper parts of themselves, and express these parts openly and honestly. Downie observes that the “training works energetically through your body. Because we store all the negative experiences that we suppress in our bodies, they all

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<sup>71</sup> This echoes Grotowski’s own language, specifically when he writes that the actor “reveals himself by casting off his every day mask” (Grotowski, 1968: 34).

start to emerge when you work physically. And over time, these things can become part of the work” (Downie, 2010a).

For this reason, the work is extremely delicate and requires patience, dedication, sensitivity, strength, and courage. A vital component of the group’s work is therefore creating an environment where each actor is carefully supported as he or she attempts to access and develop this very sensitive material. For the group, this is a matter of creating an environment where the actors are constantly aware of each other, openly giving and responding to whatever emotions, gestures, movements, and sounds may emerge during their work together. As Downie relates further, a vital element of the group’s work is “developing trust at an almost atomic level, between people’s bodies, souls, minds, and voices, so that we can support each other in as many ways as we can possibly find” (ibid.).

Within the group, then, coordination attempts to develop a mindful relationship between every actor, giving space to the whole person and whatever emotions, moods, states of mind, tensions, and energies he or she may bring at any given moment. Actor Rafał Habel asserts that performing with *Song of the Goat* is based on support: “If you have power, if you have strength, support others. Support others. In this theatre, that is the main thing, to support others. As much as possible” (Habel, 2010). The actors’ training therefore attempts to create an ensemble that functions not as a conglomerate of isolated parts, but as ‘one body’. Bral’s term emphasizes that, within the group, everything works together in harmony, where song blends into movement, text into rhythm, gesture into tone, developed and echoed across the stage as the actors respond to each other. Each distinct and individual action, voice, gesture, word, movement, and song blend together, and are “not separate things put together, but one and the same thing, coming from one source, ...one common stream of energy” (Kuszewski, 2010).

The group's search for harmony, however, is not an attempt at similarity or unison. Instead, the actors aim to build "a place where everyone's individuality is celebrated, where...everyone can be themselves and allow other people to be themselves in a generous way, and no voice is stifled"(Downie, 2009). This is best explained by Bral himself, who describes a coordination exercise where two actors "stand in front of each other and try to have something happen between them without any instigation. One is reflecting the other, but it's not...a mirroring but an attempt to respond to a vibration" (Bral, 2004: 61). As with an orchestra, the group trains so that every component mutually supports and responds to the others at every moment.

Accordingly, Bral considers himself closer to a conductor than a director, working with an ensemble of actors who are not simply employed by the theatre, but see their work as a constantly evolving practice. Bral specifies that "our work is a process of practic[ing] theatre: from each performance we carry on our practice so the next performance is not another theme or topic but a slightly higher step in our research and practice of the theatre vocabulary" (Bral, Gawin, Zubrzycki, 2010).

Because the process is driven solely through the actors' own live responses to their own personal material and to each other, new projects can take years to devise. To underline this point, the company has produced only four performances since 1996: *Song of the Goat – A Dithyramb* (1997) as discussed previously; *Chronicles – a lamentation* (*Kroniki – obyczaj lamentacyjny*) (2001); *Lacrimosa* (2005); and *Macbeth* (2008), the latter three to be analyzed in the following section. The actors' dedication and commitment to such long-term projects is a direct result of the demanding and intimate nature of the work. It is not uncommon for the actors to relocate to Wrocław during the devising process, often balancing other professional obligations and their personal lives between multiple countries. Even so, the group does change from project to project; however, many actors

stay with the group for at least two projects, which can span up to ten years. Of the seven active members outside of Bral and Zubrzycki themselves, Habel and Gabriel Gawin have been with Song of the Goat since the very beginning. The other actors have joined after participating in workshops, or through the group's MA programme, a year of rigorous actor training that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Despite the gradual shifts within the company, all actors of Song of the Goat are considered a part of the group's wider community, whether they are active or not. The group is in this way similar to an extended family and every actor, in some way, continues a relationship with the life of the company and its projects. As Katarzyna Maicher, the theatre's administrative manager, notes that while the working environment is demanding, it is equally energizing. "You do these things...because you want to do them, you want to help, you want this place to develop, ...you want to be a part of the process" (Maicher, 2009: 8).

When devising a new project, the actors work six to eight hours a day, five days a week, as they begin to uncover the core of the material upon which they are focusing. During the entire process, music plays a key role in helping the actors access the world of the text – be it the Sumerian myth of Gilgamesh for *Chronicles* or Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Believing music to be the "gate to...the imagination" (Bral and Zubrzycki, 2006), Bral and the actors almost treat the music for any given performance as an additional member of the company, anchoring their explorations and improvisations in traditional songs, laments, choral works, polyphonies, rhythms, harmonies, and instrumentations which create the backdrop for their productions.

While this understanding of music has undoubtedly been carried over from their work with Gardzienice, Bral and Zubrzycki's own interpretation and search through music is rooted in their personal experience of it. Bral observes that



when you listen...more carefully, when you listen...longer or when you are surrounded by people singing it, you experience this wonderful and quite extraordinary and difficult to understand vibration of the music that penetrates you. ...[W]ith some of the music you can only talk in metaphysical terms because actually the way they sing...[connects] you more into...nature. ...It simply connects you to nature, it simply balances you more. (Bral and Zubrzycki, 2006)

In this way, he continues, music forces you to experience it. By transporting us deep within ourselves, music allows us to tune in to our emotions, dreams, memories, and physicality. We can then open more fully to the world and connect to each other through our own capacity as human beings. Bral therefore understands that music can help us develop a deeper understanding of humanity (ibid.).

Zubrzycki explains this in a different way. Producing some of the most achingly beautiful laments and wild cries, Zubrzycki leads most of the group's vocal work as she trains the actors to open their entire bodies so that emotion, physicality, and sound may blend into one entity. For her, singing "goes around your mind and straight to your heart; you just receive it as a whole human being" (Bral and Zubrzycki, 2006). Describing this further, she makes a point to say that singing emerges naturally from life:

Singing is a spontaneous act which expresses [people's] longing, their sadness, their loss, their love... When people work, they sing because the breath is working, and because it gives them joy. And then songs are formed, and these become a vocabulary that belongs to a particular group or a particular nation. Songs that are connected to real life, and real life events, and emotions, and history. As they are handed down from person to person, each person gives themselves to the song. The songs become richer and richer, and that is why I think they...allow [actors] to access, in an unconscious way, very deep cultural images. (Zubrzycki, 2010b)

The actors begin with the voice. From vocal improvisations playing on top of a drone, a lamentation learned and developed over time, or an instrumental piece that triggers the imagination, music creates a visceral landscape or environment within which the actors may explore other elements such as text or movement. Music therefore acts as a guide for the actors, allowing them to travel deeper into their own personal material and into the life of a performance, a particular relationship that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Pairing this musical exploration with coordination exercises such as those described earlier, the actors work constantly with the rhythm of drums, stamping feet, or breath as they slowly build the world of the performance through improvisations. These are just the beginning of the final performance, creating a space in which the actors can begin to explore further; as actor Ian Morgan specifies, a space that eventually “cracks open into something much more specific” (Morgan, 2010).

While Bral is guiding this work constantly, his primary function is that of a spectator, all the time watching and listening for moments that produce ‘shivers’. As he says of his role during this process:

I try to bring inspiration, direction and then after training has started I comment on what works in my point of view and what suits the theme we are working on. So in a way my role is to...create some structures or basic exercises for them, then they take it in their own direction, they follow their own imagination. (Bral, Gawin, Zubrzycki, 2010)

During an improvisation, Bral may ask an actor to take an action further, to change the tone of the voice, or to stop thinking and simply follow the energy he or she is experiencing. When an actor finds a powerful moment, action, or sound, Bral makes a note of it so that the group will return to it, perhaps developing it further for the final production.

The key, and the ultimate paradox for the actor, as indicated by and explored in the earlier work of Osterwa and Limanowski, is for each actor to find his or her way into that same place within themselves in order to make that moment alive every time it is performed. Actor Anu Salonen notes that, because the work is “honestly and rawly coming out of you...the challenge is how not to lose the creation; how to give new life for the creation every time” (Salonen, 2010). This is a complex process, where each actor must find his or her way back into the original experience of an action without locking it into a fixed form. For instance, in the company’s current production of *Macbeth*, Zubrzycki laments while she moves from actor to actor, asking them with her hands, her eyes, and her

movements to hand over their wooden swords. Her interactions with each actor are different – singing to Morgan with outstretched arms as he lowers his sword and releases it into her hands, resigned, or directly holding onto Salonen’s sword as she pushes onto her shoulder, Salonen bending to her knees – and vary with every performance.

Initially an improvisation during rehearsals, this action was incorporated into the performance and Zubrzycki and the actors must find a way of being wholly present with each other at every moment in order to uncover the way back to the original, visceral experience of this action during rehearsals, without blocking the further living development of the action in performance. By recalling and reactivating particular gestures, images, sounds, and sensations, the actors must find a way to allow the original experience not only to re-emerge, but to adapt and change within the physical and vocal actions on each particular day, at that particular moment.

Importantly, Morgan adds that for the actors, this is also “not just about being honest; it is also about being good” (Morgan, 2010). In speaking with each of the actors during interviews, the process of constantly giving life to these moments that had occurred naturally was one of the most difficult and most pressing topics. Morgan perhaps described it best by saying:

Every night, there is a story to be told and there is a set of responsibilities and contracts to be kept; a commitment to be made for the next step to appear. Sometimes those things can come organically, or they come through technique. But you know that within all of that, it is ephemeral. No night is the same. (ibid.)

Coordination acts as an essential training for the actors, developing a process of mindfulness so that they are able to draw upon whatever energy exists at any particular moment and find their way to spontaneous acts of expression.

Before shaping the final production, the actors have a huge amount of raw material. Songs, actions, scenes, and improvisations are then funnelled into a final structure shaped

by Bral. He elaborates that, “in the end my role is to choose the bricks of the elements that they have been improvising and create a structure....to cool down the process of rehearsing into the structure. All the material you see in the performance is theirs” (Bral, Gawin, Zubrzycki, 2010). For the actors, this process can be quite painful, as years of work are condensed into a performance that usually lasts no longer than an hour. In discussing this, Habel notes that it takes time for the material in a performance to hold the same richness it had during rehearsals. But, he says, “the beginning of a new performance is like recalling the process inside of a new structure. Because the process before was so rich, ...I think the performances have this possibility to grow. And they grow so much” (Habel, 2010).

Because of this, the group’s work is in a constant state of evolution. Performances run until the actors feel that they can no longer find any live connections, but the research progresses into the group’s next production. Zubrzycki elaborates: “We do not pick a subject and just drop it afterwards. Things are always in process, so when we start one performance, it...spills over into the next and into other research which we do” (Bral and Zubrzycki, 2006). *Chronicles*, which was retired three years and 200 performances after its premiere, developed on from *Song of the Goat – A Dithyramb*, exploring the world of ritual and mythology through music. The group’s next performance, *Lacrimosa*, sought to explore the musicality of movement, confronting the actors with a structurally challenging piece. The last production of *Lacrimosa* was given in 2008.

*Song of the Goat*’s recent production, *Macbeth*, has built on their previous work, extending their search to embody the musicality of Shakespeare’s text. Blending music, movement, words, emotion, and action the actors attempt to create the despairing and dark world of *Macbeth*’s descent. Since its premiere in 2008, this performance – like each of the group’s performances – has undergone significant shifts, despite the fact that the performance’s structure has remained largely unchanged. More than anything, this is a

result of the actors' working process; even after a performance is in production, its life continues to transform and adapt as the actors find more and more depth within the actions and interactions. Each of these performances will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

The life of each piece and the distinct way in which it evolves over time depends heavily on the actors' own engagement with each other every time they perform. As Morgan asks himself:

How can I get into the place where I, today, can be undivided and receptive to the material and my colleagues, and just be here and now. If we do that, and are honest to our tasks as actors, and honest to ourselves as humans, ...then something special can happen. (Morgan, 2010)

As a result, audience members who return to see a performance often believe the group has made significant changes to the production. But, as Habel explains, "It is simply the energy developing: the energy going through different people, different protagonists. Every day is different and the audience [is able to] see different dimensions" (Habel, 2010).

Song of the Goat's performances therefore seek to create a living experience of interconnection between people. By following sensations, emotions, and their imaginations, the group builds its work intuitively and gradually, such that each aspect evolves organically, never forcing work to become a product. As Bral explains, "The only quick result with pushing is war. When you really start pushing, and want quick results, you have to destroy someone else. But if you think that is not the way, then everything...needs to simultaneously consider everybody involved" (Bral, 2008).

By allowing both the relationships and artistic material within each performance to develop naturally, Song of the Goat is able to shape a theatre practice that exists in harmony with the people who create it and the audiences for whom it is created. The work, at all levels, is part and parcel of humanity. Downie observes that, "if we search as honestly and as truthfully as we possibly can, and if we try to speak from some deep and

primal...part of ourselves; if we succeed in any way, if we make a link with the audience, then in a way we can give them an experience of a truer level of themselves” (Downie, 2010a). Searching for the complete coordination within and between every individual, Song of the Goat creates powerful performances as an organic exploration of “human to human” connection (Bral, 2009).

### **Research, Expedition, Performance**

To further enhance this interconnection in performance, the actors’ weave their work with embedded traditions, rituals, songs, texts, and dances of diverse communities worldwide. Bral understands that these traditions demonstrate “incredibly sophisticated ways of reaching your own depth and truth” (Bral and Zubrzycki, 2006). The group therefore searches for material that maintains a living connection to its emergent culture and community in an attempt to find new and powerful ways of accessing their own personal material.

Often travelling to remote places in order to experience the traditions personally, the actors begin to explore their own responses to the material as they begin to build a unique emotional, physical, and vocal language of a given performance (Downie, 2010b; Habel, 2010). Zubrzycki explains of this process: “Before we create a performance, we research particular traditions, and enter into a kind of dialogue with them in our own way. We look for a very deep source every time. The deeper the source..., the deeper the performance” (Zubrzycki, 2010a). These deep sources, ranging from mythologies, trance rituals, and ceremonial dance to ancient rhythms and mourning rites, emerge through the very lives, emotions, desires, and needs of unique communities. The actors therefore believe they provide access to an experience of being human. In this sense, culturally rooted material

offers the group a foundation through which to forge a personal exploration of each individual's own emotional and psychic life.

While material of this nature drives each project, Song of the Goat's performances are equally inspired by text. Focusing primarily on myths and tragedies, Song of the Goat bases its work on material that has the potential to evoke strong emotional responses in both the actors and the audience. These forms hold an innate ability to cut deeply into the core of our humanity, accessing material that may have remained relatively untouched or hidden for years.

Outside of the group's first performance which, as discussed earlier, incorporated fragments from Euripides' *The Bacchae* through its exploration of Dionysian ritual, each of the group's three later productions was initiated through powerful and culturally rooted texts. Their 2001 production of *Chronicles – A Lamentation* was developed, for instance, from the ancient Sumerian tale of *Gilgamesh*. Four years later, *Lacrimosa* (2005) was created from the group's focus on Andrzej Szczypiorski's *A Mass for Arras* (*Msza za miasto Arras*), a fictional account of crimes resulting from an outbreak of the plague in medieval France. The current production, first performed in 2008, is based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. As Morgan notes, the choice of material for each of these performances holds "relevance on a deep human level that opens people: betrayal – the betrayal of self, the betrayal of a community; and revelation and realization of guilt" (Morgan, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, the actors do not approach text analytically, but holistically. Guided by their practice of coordination, they search for a way into the text through their bodies, senses, and voices, in order to find their own responses to it. While they do study each individual text, the actors pay closer attention to the flow of energy within the story – for example, the spiralling darkness and desperation in Shakespeare's use of language as he

depicts Macbeth's fall – instead of focusing on the linear development of characters.

Overwhelmingly, their productions seek to illustrate the emotional and visceral world of a particular text. Believing that every text holds its own idiosyncratic images, environment, movement, and musicality, the group deliberately extends its notion of coordination to the text, constantly listening and responding to the needs of the words, characters, and story.

Typically, this begins for Song of the Goat with music. As discussed previously, music helps the actors build and enter into the landscape of each performance. Searching for songs that touch them deeply, whether a recording of an old man singing a traditional Greek folk song, liturgical chants of the Russian Orthodox Church, or music played on the oud by musicians from the Sub-Saharan region of Africa, the actors attempt to embody the music, feeling its pulse through their bodies, and finding the tone with their voices. With this material as a trigger, the actors begin to “create [their] own vibrations” (Zubrzycki, 2008), building their own emotional, physical, and often spiritual point of reference within the line of music so that they open themselves to the possibility of anchoring their performance into a much more profound human experience.

An example of this is their production, *Chronicles – A Lamentation*, which premiered at the Grotowski Centre in 2001. Based on the Sumerian myth of Gilgamesh, the part-man and part-god king, and his confrontation with mortality through the death of his friend, Enkidu, the performance centres on mourning and the experience of loss. They began listening to music from the region in which the story emerged, learning a huge number of beautifully elaborate songs. However, as Zubrzycki notes, this was more of an “intellectual acknowledgement” (Bral and Zubrzycki, 2006), which strove to fit the music in with the environment of the story instead of connecting organically with the actors. She continues, explaining that the group began to investigate the core of the myth, search for



music that “struck a deep chord within us... [This] actually opened Gilgamesh up to make it a universal story, not just rooted in that geographical location” (ibid.).

This led the group to lamentation and, eventually, to Epirus, a small mountainous region between Albania and Greece, where the art of the lament is still practiced. While this is undertaken largely by the entire community, in some instances a family will employ a lamenter, who improvises stories that may take the shape of ‘lamentation deceits’, or factual accounts threaded with fictional, even mythical, events. Wailing and weeping as they mourn for the deceased, the women that Song of the Goat met guide the soul into the afterlife, offering proper respect and honour through the stories they weave, and giving voice to emotions the family may not be able to express themselves.<sup>72</sup> These lamenters act as conduits through which potent emotions can be channelled, awakening such intense feelings of pain that some lose consciousness or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy (Bral and Zubrzycki, 2006). As Bral relates of a conversation with one of the women, they believe that the laments come not from the conscious mind, but from pain itself (ibid.).

Exploring this tradition through their own training, the group began to blend these vocalizations with a polyphonic musical structure they had witnessed in Albania. Shaped around “three or four voices”, Bral describes that the music interlaces “the one who weaves, the one who cuts, the one who gives, and the drone – the one who holds”, with each voice freely following its own line, but always within the structure of the other voices (ibid.). Polyphony, in this respect, is the musical structure of Song of the Goat’s work in coordination. Allowing the music to direct and shape their movements, the group slowly began to construct the physical language of the performance. Bral explains that the “songs

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<sup>72</sup> Margaret Alexiou discusses that, in Greek tradition, the act of lamentation, or mourning the dead, is traditionally performed by women. The male role in funereal rites is primarily to do with commemorating the dead. See: Margaret Alexiou (2002) *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, rev. Dimitrios Yatromanolakis and Panagiotis Roilos, Greek Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches, series ed. Gregory Nagy, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, pp. 108; 122-125.

became our directors. ...We've never really choreographed this performance. It was never said, 'Go like this. Move like this'. No. We were just singing, singing, and then I told my actors, 'Okay, you have to take a risk and see this unpredictable, spontaneous, intuitive movement which...is hidden [in the music]'" (ibid.).

*Chronicles*, as a result, creates a devastatingly beautiful experience of loss. Finding a seamless harmony between the laments and the movement, breath, rhythms, and tone, the seven actors inhabit the space with elasticity and fluidity. Accompanied only by a pulsing harmonium and the sounds of each breathing, living body in the space, Gilgamesh and Enkidu confront Death, and play out their fates. In the shadows, a bare-chested Enkidu, played by Marcin Rudy, cuts through the air like an animal with primitive strength, taunting, virile, and driven by some unseen force. Zubrzycki, as the mother of Gilgamesh, leans upon Maria Sendow as Death, seeming to give a painful and doomed birth. These women's voices writhe and slice, rising and rising until joined by the Goddess Ishtar, played by Anna Krotoska, who emerges from the shadows, feeding off the power of their voices with a sound that seem to pull from the depths of her soul, holding the moment until she releases it in a furious onslaught of words.

With the death of Enkidu, the performance culminates in waves of wild passions that fall into a hushed and despairing intensity. As he dies in the lap of Gilgamesh, Enkidu's body is brought to lie on a table while Christopher Sivertson as the Shaman sings a devastating lament from the dark. Gilgamesh helps Enkidu rise from the table. Together with the Shaman, the three men soundlessly begin to lift their bodies into the air, forming a mesmerizing pattern of their bodies over and around the table in unimaginably slow lifts, turns, and flips, leaving the audience entranced by the sheer grace and beauty of the moment.

The performance ends just as quietly. As the actors disappear one by one, the audience is left to contemplate, weep, and mourn in utter darkness. As one reviewer observed, *Chronicles* succeeds in creating “a cathartic outpouring of energies that connects myth and reality across centuries, that traces the roots of theatre back to the rituals of mourning and reminds us, appositely, that if life is short then art is enduring” (Brennan, 2004).

Moving on from this, the group shifted its initial research away from music and into the physical language of a piece, using movement to instigate their work in coordination for its next production, the 2005 *Lacrimosa*. Long fascinated by the fire-walking that is still practiced by the Anastenarides in isolated villages in northern Greece, Bral and the actors were invited into an Anastenarides community and given an opportunity to witness the biannual rituals devoted to Saint Constantine and Helen of the Greek Orthodox Church. Accompanied by repetitive and highly rhythmical traditional music, the Anastenarides, who are often very old women, enter into an ecstatic state, dancing, calling, and crying. Over time, they believe they become possessed by the spirit of the saints. Holding onto icons or pieces of cloth that are believed to contain the supernatural power of the saints themselves, the participants are led by the power of the saints into the fire, dancing barefoot across hot coals.

Practiced as a healing ritual, the Anastenaria is believed to cleanse the participants of physical and mental illnesses, bad fortune, curses, and psychological strain, and, for the community, provides balance and a strong spiritual and moral system within which these small groups may continue to thrive. Loring Danforth, an anthropologist who has spent extensive time with the community, explains:

Spirit possession is a particularly powerful religious idiom or language that enables people to articulate and often resolve...[social and psychological] problems by redefining their relationships with the possessing spirit so that they acquire the

supernatural power they need in order to be healed. Ritual therapy is, therefore, a process of transformation and empowerment through which people are metaphorically moved from a state of illness to a state of health. (Danforth, 1989: 5)

Inspired by the openness, generosity, and courage of the Anastenarides, in addition to the actual physicality of their movements during these rituals, the members of Song of the Goat began to focus their work on exploring their own physical and emotional response to what they had witnessed. In describing the ritual, Zubrzycki notes that the participants “had these completely unexpected movements and cries within a very structured rhythm” (Zubrzycki, 2010b) as they became possessed and went into the fire. Building group improvisations based on this quality of movement through strong rhythmical work and with constant support of the group, the actors attempted to find the impulse within themselves to experience this deep state of possession.

The textual material that arose for this performance was Szczypiorski’s *A Mass for Arras*, with fragments from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* and the Gospel of St. John.<sup>73</sup> Based on historical documentation, Szczypiorski’s text is a fictional parable that relates the horrendous crimes that took place in the French village of Arras in the late fifteenth century. Following a devastating outbreak of the plague, the town collapses in a fury, with accounts of rape, murder, and cannibalism after the town is barricaded and resources cut off. When the disease subsides, the surviving townspeople begin to realise the severity of their transgressions. Instigated by the Bishop’s desire to identify and exterminate the demonic forces that brought upon these crimes, the community grotesquely distorts their faith as Christians. Seizing on their need for absolution, they blindly accuse the town’s Jewish community of witchcraft, which rapidly escalates into a senseless and brutal massacre.

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<sup>73</sup> Szczypiorski’s *A Mass for Arras* is available in English translation. See: Andrzej Szczypiorski (1993) *A Mass for Arras*, trans. Richard Lourie, New York: Grove Press

Szczypiorski's text resonates strongly with Polish audiences. Written in 1968, he sought to draw attention to political events in Poland during March of the same year. Spurred by the premature closure of the National Theatre of Warsaw's performance of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* on the pretence of the text inciting anti-Soviet sentiment, students responded through marches and demonstrations which eventually erupted into massive protests around the country. The government responded severely, arresting 1200 students, expelling professors who supported their cause, and disbanding whole departments within the university in order to realign them with party politics (Leslie, 1980: 390; Davies, 2005: 442). Shortly thereafter, accusations began to emerge through the mainstream media, blaming the riots on Jewish students "acting in the interest of the international Zionist movement in order to besmirch People's Poland" (Leslie, 1980: 390). As a result, of the estimated 40,000 Jews still living in Poland following the Second World War, 30,000 were forced to leave the country, pressured by what Leslie refers to as a full-blown "witchhunt" (ibid.: 391).

*A Mass for Arras* is a powerful social commentary that warns of the dangers of blind faith, persecution, and ignorance. By incorporating this text into their performance, Song of the Goat sought to look more closely into the heart of Poland's discordant relationship with its Jewish community, relying less on Szczypiorski's words than on the powerful and often horrifying images, emotions, judgments, and miscalculations it emphasizes. As their most political piece, albeit not overtly, *Lacrimosa* attempts to capture the cruel emotional reality of "a single person usurping the right to offer up the life of another" (Song of the Goat, 2007) in the name of God.

Blending this with arrangements from Mozart's *Requiem*, Song of the Goat has created a forceful performance exploding with aggression and cruelty that is always underlined by a gruesome beauty. Wrapped in swathes of white fabric that recall leper's

rag, the actors command the energy in the space from the very beginning of the performance. Moving and breathing as a complete whole, Marcin Rudy, as the Bishop, manipulates the ensemble with his sheer presence; the group drawn to him as if by a magnet, seamlessly following his movements as he walks away, falling backwards as he pushes towards them. The audience eased into the piece through the reverent choral singing of *Agnus Dei*, the actors later slip into a wild and grotesque chorus, repeating the song in wide harsh tones as they transform themselves into a degenerate, licentious horde. The tension is only released once the actors have left the stage, leaving the audience in silence.

Working from such difficult, and powerful, material, the production itself proved extremely challenging to perform. The actors found the most strength from their improvisations, but, as Habel describes, it was difficult to find the same support and freedom within the performance's actual structure. For this reason, he explains that "we try to treat every performance as a one-hour training. So the structure was there, but the structure...does not really give us any strength because it is made to not give us strength. It is made to cut your guts" (Habel, 2010). Of all of Song of the Goat's productions, therefore, *Lacrimosa* has shifted most dramatically, due largely to this challenging nature of its material. Although it consistently delivers an overwhelmingly powerful experience, the performance has faced difficulties in maintaining an overall sense of cohesion. This makes *Lacrimosa* extremely strenuous for the performers, who at times seem to fight their way through as they try to maintain a point of reference for themselves, and maintain contact with each other so that they can continue to offer support through the difficult material.

In discussing this performance, Zubrzycki suggests that the largest challenge lies in the music. *Chronicles* drew upon a musical tradition that penetrated deep into the heart of the actors, providing infinite space for the actors to explore sounds, resonances, tones, rhythm, in addition to the emotions of loss, pain, despair, and hope. However, because this

performance began not with music, but with movement, the group was not able to find the connecting thread into these emotions. As she explains, the music didn't "give space...so [the performance] could never go beyond a certain level" (Zubrzycki, 2010b).

Two and a half years after the premiere, the group began to perform an 'anthropological version' of *Lacrimosa*, which sought to contextualize the material by showing footage of the Anastenaria ritual filmed in Greece during one of their expeditions. This was followed by a short improvisation prior to the actual performance, demonstrating the way in which the group developed the physical language of the piece. Shortly thereafter, the actors exchanged their ragged costumes for everyday clothing. It was this decision that ultimately gave new life to the performance.

Opening it beyond the portrayal of tragic historical events, *Lacrimosa* all of sudden held a much more urgent and immediate plea for tolerance and understanding of diverse cultures. This was most evident in one of the group's final performances of *Lacrimosa*, during a tour in Sarajevo. Concerned by presenting such a topic to audiences who had actually seen and survived such atrocities, Habel describes that the actors were surprised by the response of the audience. During a scene when Zubrzycki, in a moment of fury, pulls a skull from a bag around her waist, an audience member audibly gasped, "Milosevic!"

As Habel points out from this experience, "We couldn't believe the meanings that appeared in the performance. Meanings where you watch what you're doing and it feels completely new, completely different to what it was before – deeper, stronger, darker" (Habel, 2010). In this respect, it is possible to understand that Song of the Goat's work holds more power than simply telling or illustrating a story. By creating an emotional world of each individual text, they allow audiences access into deeper associations that may hold poignancy in their own lives.

Within the scope of their work, *Lacrimosa* has proved to be a vital step in the further development of Song of the Goat's work. Because each performance is part of an ongoing process in which the actors strive to uncover the deepest, most honest connection within and between themselves and with the material, every performance requires different levels and quality of engagement. In each case, however, the group must simply follow their own responses and the material in order to discover the path that is most true for them as actors. Bral relates:

You never know whether it is the right music; whether it is the right inspiration. You just try your way. And sometimes you are too stubborn, and sometimes you disbelieve something. So [this] is really a good process of seeing something completely invisible come into reality, ...but it is something that you very slowly have to see inside yourself and allow it to manifest externally. It takes time; patience. And it requires from you a constant search for truth. (Bral, 2008)

By drawing on different sources for each of their productions, the members of Song of the Goat must search constantly for new ways in which to establish these connections.

*Lacrimosa* challenged the actors and pushed them to explore different channels, which has ultimately led to a more profound understanding – and sophisticated practice – of coordination on all levels – emotionally, technically, and in relation to each other.

### ***Macbeth***

The group's most recent production, *Macbeth*, is testament to the progression of their training in coordination.<sup>74</sup> Performed in English and premiering in 2008 after almost two years of development, Song of the Goat's performance has intensified their work in coordination as they consciously create the visceral world of *Macbeth* as a holistic experience.<sup>75</sup> While this has admittedly been the intention throughout the course of their

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<sup>74</sup> Based on personal observations of the rehearsals and performances of *Macbeth* between January 2008 and November 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Because Song of the Goat is an international ensemble, the working language – as noted in the Introduction – is primarily in English. Both *Chronicles* and *Lacrimosa* were performed using a combination of languages:



work, the group's level of awareness has shifted, allowing for a deeper engagement with the subtleties of interconnection. Working primarily from text for the first time, the actors focused on the power held within Shakespeare's original language and the musicality of words themselves, searching the boundaries between text and song, movement, emotion, gesture, thought, and action in order to embody the essence of the play.

Understanding the text to contain the "blood and bones of language" (Zubrzycki, 2010b), the actors approached *Macbeth* as they would any other deeply rooted cultural material. Everything is held within the words themselves, according to Zubrzycki, including not only the voices and stories of the characters, but the actual landscape of their world found in the sounds, the rhythm, and structure of the language. Bral's intention in this work was therefore that the actors break through implied meaning and interpretation in order to reveal the very life of the words.

Although rehearsals for this project began as early as 2006, work began in earnest when the actors first heard the polyphonies of the Corsican group, A Filetta. Song of the Goat's initial searches had led them first to traditional Korean music, and later to the polyphonic songs of lost Siberian villages through the singing of the Irkutsk Ensemble Authentic Music, whose music was a large part of their work demonstration at the RSC's Complete Works Festival in 2007.

However, the group found both of these approaches too restrictive for the text. Zubrzycki points out that *Macbeth* is "so dense and so strong, you can't hammer it to death. You have got to give it space to live and breathe" (Zubrzycki, 2010a). Already densely layered polyphonies constructed largely within a very close harmonic structure, these

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English, Polish, and, in the case of *Lacrimosa*, French. This was to accommodate the diverse cast for these respective productions. With *Macbeth*, however, Bral wanted to focus on Shakespeare's language in the original English. While three of the seven members of the cast for this performance are non-native English speakers, the group based their research and performance on the original English language text.

Siberian songs offered little contrast with the dark and despairing world of *Macbeth*, effectively closing the sound and providing very little space within the tones for the actors to work.

Bral describes that the music of A Filetta, on the other hand, offered “an incredibly beautiful space for the text to be researched” (Bral, Gawin, Zubrzycki, 2010). Five unaccompanied male voices led by singer and composer Jean-Claude Aquaviva, the group’s music weaves intricate harmonies and dissonances within an almost hushed intensity, creating an ethereal world of inferences and beauty. Because of this, the music allowed for fluidity and interpretation within the notes. While the strong tones and rhythm of the Siberian songs restricted possibilities of movement, action, and emotion for the actors, A Filetta’s music gently holds a kind of space within and between the interwoven sounds, suggesting an emotional landscape without requiring it.

With permission from Aquaviva, the actors began to learn these polyphonies, carefully exploring the interplay of tones as the music guided them deeper and deeper into the world of the text. Rehearsals were typically divided into two sections: singing for three to four hours in the mornings led by Zubrzycki and Kuszewski, followed by group rehearsals with Bral in the evenings. The morning work consisted largely of learning the challenging music which, in the later rehearsals, was incorporated as a basis for both vocal and physical improvisation. The progression of the rehearsals for *Macbeth* was an organic process itself; they never had an agenda, but instead patiently followed the specific energy of the actors at any given moment during their work such that the group could delve deeper into the physical processes necessary to achieve a stronger level of connection.

Fundamentally, the rehearsals were grounded in the search for the musicality of the text. To do this, the actors based their work in vocal improvisations, slowly unravelling the text by exploring its shape and vibration, experimenting with tone, resonators, and

intensity, and following the energy into the body, in the form of actions, interactions, gestures, and movement. Bral describes this as letting the “text tell you what to do and not the other way around” (Bral, 2008). Throwing a ball between them while listening to A Filetta, for example, the actors allowed the music to guide their bodies; their movements following and playing with the rhythm, tone, and intensity of the songs. After this, Bral might ask an actor to incorporate text slowly, with the ensemble keeping the feeling and flow of the music in their actions. While throwing, catching, rolling, or bouncing the ball, an actor would begin with words and fragments of text, which would be interjected with cries, grunts, sighs, and howls as it shifted naturally with the breath and level of exertion. Using the body as a medium, the actors would tune their physicality to the music and then allow the words to emerge in connection with their movements.

Pulling the ball out, the actors might then begin a drone that aimed to keep the movement and tonality of the music in their bodies and voices. Perhaps held on a single note, two notes, or accompanied by the kayagum, a Korean zither played by Habel, an actor would explore a section of text, searching for the coordination between the music and the words. Downie notes that this is an extremely delicate process and one that required patience, focus, and an ability to open oneself up to the surrounding sounds. Using an example from Malcolm’s dialogue with Macduff in Act IV, scene iii, “Let us seek out some desolate shade, and there weep our sad bosoms empty”, he explains that, on the one hand, it is very easy to push too hard, slapping the words against the music so that they exist in contradiction to one other – harsh, blunt, and severe. On the other hand, it is equally easy to give in too much. By allowing the words to be swept away by the flow of the music, the text weakens as it disintegrates into the tones and harmonies with no resistance, thereby losing its meaning (Downie, 2011).

Song of the Goat, however, was looking for a place between these two extremes, where each word could emerge and respond to the sounds, rhythms, and intensities of the song, taking its independence from the music and, at the same time, allowing its meaning to intuitively transform as it rides the sounds (Downie, 2011). The aim during work such as this was that the actors find a way in which the text is not interpreted, as such, but is subtle, nuanced, and so connected within the actors' bodies that it flows freely from them.

Weaving the songs of A Filetta with lamentations of the Old Believers, a community that broke from the Russian Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century, the underlying foundation of the performance is Habel's accompaniment on the kayagum. Acting as a guide throughout the performance, the actors constantly refer to the instrument, playing with its cadences and melodies as they allow it to shape their own tones, movements, and interactions. In developing material for her work on the witches during an early rehearsal, Salonen followed a primal energy she found through her voice. Exploring the animalistic quality of the tones that emerged, she began to embody the sounds as she allowed the sounds to course through her body and direct her movements. Forming a circle around her, the group held a drone, supporting her continually with their voices, their presence, and active responses to her.

The movement of the piece has therefore evolved as musicality, stemming from the music, felt as music, and embodied as music, which can be seen throughout the production. In the dream sequence prior to Duncan's death, where Duncan is lifted onto his feet by the breath of two women, who blow their words, "Sleep no more" and "Macbeth hath murdered sleep", towards his knees, hips, shoulders and elbows as the breath hits his body in waves that raise him, transfixed, in enchanted slumber. Likewise, the group worked closely with *kata*, a set of prescribed movements upon which many forms of Japanese martial arts are based. Using simple wooden swords called *bokken*, the actors developed

powerful scenes that smoothly sweep from thrusts to turns to blocks with beautiful choral precision.

Music has become a lifeline for the actors. Downie comments that, because the actors must recreate living connections between themselves, with the text, the music, and the audience for every performance, “the safety net is...vanishingly small. In this production, what is our safety net? The music; and each other” (Downie, 2010a). These elements are of vital importance, and have been threaded through the entire production. While the performance does have a set shape, this is merely an outline for the actors, giving them as much freedom as possible to improvise movements, sounds, and interactions as they follow the life and energy at every moment for each individual performance. As with their other performances, support between the actors is vital. Their performances of *Macbeth* are a balancing act, with each actor on a tightrope as they maintain constant presence, awareness, and mindfulness so that they may, each night, find the profound integration between movement, music, and the word.

After two years of performing, Song of the Goat’s *Macbeth* has gradually shifted, deepening and intensifying the connections between the actors and their material. When the production first opened in 2008, its structure was newly forged. From hours of raw material, Bral and the actors had in less than a month selected and woven together elements from the year-long training and devising process in order to fashion a ninety minute performance. This process refers to a point made earlier in this chapter regarding the paradox for the actors; namely, how to reformulate spontaneously experienced moments for performance. In this beginning stage of the life of *Macbeth*, the actor’s work in coordination was driven by their attempt to blend each individual improvisation into a cohesive structure. Over time, however, these moments became more naturally knit together. As a result, the actors have been able to find an increased amount of space within

their actions, words, laments, and movement, which has allowed them to connect more deeply with each other.

This heightened level of coordination the actors have achieved with *Macbeth* was most apparent during performances on their 2010 tour of the UK – now running at just over an hour – where two particular moments illustrate the way in which coordination has taken on a new life. In the beginning of the play, Lady Macbeth, played by Zubrzycki, relates the letter in which Macbeth describes the witches’ prediction of his rise to power. As she speaks, the actors, led by Kuszewski, sing a heart-breaking lament from the shadows, with only their pleading eyes lit by the light. During this tour, Zubrzycki found a space through which to place her voice, lift her words into the music where they rode the waves of the song, soaring to new heights and becoming more than words and more than song.

Later in the play, Malcolm, played by Downie, steals away following the death of Duncan in an attempt to decide whether to flee for his safety or revenge his father. Building from the kata movements, Downie begins to lift and toss, twist and catch the *bokken* as words almost visibly flow into the sword through his torso and his arms. While both this moment and Zubrzycki’s explained above have been performed consistently and strongly since the premiere, during this tour these actors were able to find an even deeper level of assimilation with the sounds and movements around them. Joining themselves to the elements and bodies on stage, they were able to intensify these scenes and penetrate the hearts and imaginations of those watching.

Song of the Goat’s *Macbeth* has managed to stretch Shakespeare’s language beyond words into an encompassing and primal world of human destruction. This intense level of coordination, this complete harmony between every element of performance, has taken years to achieve. As Bral comments, “Now, after fourteen, fifteen years, I could say that we only started touching something that is very profound and significant” (Bral, 2009).

However, each of the group's three major productions indicates the group's strong commitment to the creation of a holistic exploration of their varied source material. In each case, as Morgan notes, the audience "receives from us our hearts, our sweat, our breath, the tone of our impulses, the tone of our gestures, our voices; the whole event...is not just defined by the individual's action but by the whole composition" (Morgan, 2010).

Song of the Goat's performances therefore engage completely not only with the text but with the voice, the body, the mind, and the psyche of the actor and the audience. For Habel, the audience is a vital element in the work because their energy directly influences and feeds the evolving shape of a performance. He explains his understanding of performance as a "feeling situation, when you as an actor *feel*. You feel how to go in order to find contact with the audience. ...When they are with you, then we start to meet; and we, even as performers, start to see new meaning" (Habel, 2010), as evidenced in the example of their performance of *Lacrimosa* in Sarajevo.

This is an essential aspect of the group's work, and an indication of the powerful potential of this conscious, connective approach to performance. Composing an environment in which the actors and the audience meet each other honestly and openly, Song of the Goat provides a space and time in which people engage in a shared and mutually created dialogue as the natural product of live communication between people. Following every performance at their space in Wrocław, the audience emerges from the theatre in an almost stunned silence. More often than not, people cluster in groups in the small lobby, not necessarily speaking with each other, but simply standing with each other. A common reaction following any of Song of the Goat's performances is speechlessness. For some, the experience is even stronger. After one of the last performances of *Chronicles* in July 2007, the house slowly cleared, leaving three women behind. Two of them sat side by side, holding hands as they stared into the space. The third sat alone, head in her hands,

weeping. For many, this is why audience members will return again and again to Song of the Goat's performances. By drawing audiences into a visceral exploration of stories, images, and sounds, the actors offer a purifying, cathartic experience of something bigger than oneself.

As was discussed in the first chapter of this study, interaction between the audience and actors is the fundamental component of theatre as a unique art form. However, as with Osterwa, Grotowski, Odin Teatret, and Gardzienice, the depth of interaction in the work of Song of the Goat demonstrates a deliberate effort to develop theatre as a deeper experience of what it means to be human. This is not to say that the group requires this level of intensity from their audience. On the contrary; as Bral asserts, the group's intention is simply for the audience to "enter the space, and to feel the harmony and beauty [so that it] affects you, and gives you pleasure. It gives you joy. It gives you discovery of your own sensitivity. We're trying to give people some kind of experience of possible inner realms" (Bral, 2010b).

With this level of interaction comes great responsibility; a fact which Bral acknowledges. He explains that it is therefore necessary to give actors a training that helps them understand this responsibility. And for him, this "responsibility is that their instrument is human to human. Not string to ear and then to soul [as with a musician]. It is human to human" (Bral, 2009). By training the actors not only as performers but as human beings, theatre for Song of the Goat has evolved into a social experience through performance, providing the means through which people may connect with each other in an honest, open, and essentially human way.



## **Education and Charity**

By approaching theatre so holistically, Song of the Goat's work has extended beyond the life of the ensemble and reached directly into the social world. Because our lives are inextricably bound in a network of social relationships, every individual thought, decision, word, and action is part and parcel of that framework. With reference to Elias, whose particularly social understanding of human society was outlined in Chapter One, he remarks that

the actions of many separate individuals, particularly in a society as complex as our own, must incessantly link together to form long chains of actions if the actions of each individual are to fulfil their purposes. And in this way each individual person is really tied; he is tied by living in permanent functional dependence on other people; he is a link in the chains binding other people, just as all others, directly or indirectly, are links in the chains which bind him. These chains are not visible and tangible in the same way as iron chains. They are more elastic, more variable, more changeable; but they are no less real, and certainly no less strong. And it is this network of the functions which people have for each other, it and nothing else, that we call 'society'. (Elias, 1991: 16)

Inextricably linked to one another, every aspect of our lives affects and is affected by these relationships.

In Buddhist thought, this understanding precipitates the belief that each individual must find a way in which to live such that every action has a positive affect on the surrounding world. With reference to Rinpoche: "Instead of always thinking in terms of our own desires, comforts and happiness – quite unconcerned about the welfare of others – our aim...is to develop genuine kindness and compassion for everyone" (Rinpoche, 1994: 29). Every action must therefore be considered with relation to its wider effects.

This belief has had a profound influence on Bral and Zubrzycki's work. To this end, they have followed the natural progression of their work not only as an artistic practice, but as an integrated life practice that encompasses a wide range of activities with strong resonance in the surrounding world. As Zubrzycki explains, it becomes clear at some point that "you see what else you can do, what other good things can happen out of your work,

what other bigger picture can be created from your work. Then it makes it more meaningful” (Zubrzycki, 2009). Song of the Goat’s work has therefore opened beyond the training and performance research, searching constantly to find new ways in which to serve others with respect, honour, and compassion.

This has manifested itself in a number of diverse ways. One significant aspect is the group’s pedagogical work, which is carried out not only through annual workshops led by the company, but through its own MA in Acting programme. As a collaboration between Song of the Goat and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), the one-year biennial course is organised by Zubrzycki and MMU’s Head of School of Theatre, Niamh Dowling, with the aim to introduce young actors to the practice of performance as a living process. Working from Song of the Goat’s theatre in Wrocław, the students closely follow the company’s own working process; taught by members of the company, they train in coordination, conduct extensive performance research through expeditions to places such as Greece, Siberia, and Spain, and are guided through the devising process in order to create their own performance.

Travelling from countries such as Finland, Norway, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, USA, Canada, and the UK, the students learn to investigate their own physical, vocal, and imaginative lives as the basis for their creative work. Downie, who was a member of the first MA in 2005, relates that this early stage of the work is simply introducing people to the process of uncovering depths they may never have known were possible, and beginning to allow a space in which the group may connect on a deeper, instinctual level (Downie, 2009).

While this happen naturally over the course of the training, the process is enhanced by the expeditions. As an important component of the programme, these serve not only as a means of performance research, but as a shared experience for the group. Travelling

together into often quite remote or foreign regions, meeting people and learning to communicate with them, tasting new foods, and walking the landscape, expeditions fundamentally “enrich the company. Every experience you have with somebody brings you closer. And if it is a different experience in a different environment, the relationship deepens” (Zubrzycki, 2008).

Since 2005, Song of the Goat has taken the students to Greece, Siberia, and Spain, with the newest intake schedule to visit Romania in January 2012. The intention behind these expeditions is for the young actors to experience traditions, art forms, music, and landscapes in their living contexts. To briefly outline one of these trips, the students on the 2007 MA travelled to Olkhon Island, located in the middle of Lake Baikal. Working closely with singers from the Irkutsk Ensemble Authentic Music, the same group with whom the actors had worked on the early stages of *Macbeth*, the students trained for ten days on the cliffs overlooking the water. The Irkutsk Ensemble taught them traditional Russian songs, many of which had been collected from village along the coast of the lake that had been entirely flooded by the construction of a new dam. Giving voice to these songs in the context and landscape in which they were originally created and sung, the students were given an opportunity to experience the physical sensation of this music.

The group combined this work with relaxation exercises, acrobatics, coordination training, and elements from the Alexander Technique. They explored different resonances within their bodies, worked on developing strong and seamless drones, and practiced difficult rhythms, all in preparation for the beginning stages of developing their final performance based on Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*. Additionally, Bral and Zubrzycki led the group on night runs, similar to those practiced in Gardzienice, took the students to sacred Buryat shrines around the island, and led silent hikes to watch the sunrise. The ultimate aim

was for the students to have the opportunity to tune into themselves and each other more easily once removed from external influences.

Many of the students have continued to make theatre that connects into a broader social framework. One student joined the pilgrimage of women who lost their husbands, sons, and brothers in the horrible massacre of Srebrenica. His project developed from his experiences with these courageous women as they walked together in order to collect the newly identified bodies from the mass grave sites in order to provide a proper burial. Another student began work with women from small villages outside of Istanbul who had resettled in the city. She travelled with them on their journey back to their communities, where they worked together to revive the traditional songs and storytelling, eventually crafting elements from this experience into a performance presented in Istanbul.

Salonen, another former MA student, was inspired to find the lost lamentations of her Finnish culture, searching for the connection between her voice, the sounds of the songs, and the landscape and cultural memories they evoked. By providing an experience of theatre as a force that emerges from and connects to the lives and hearts of people, *Song of the Goat* seeks to offer students an alternative approach to performance practice that is actively rooted in the wider world. As Zubrzycki explains, her ultimate goal is simply that the students have “experienced something new, ...stretched themselves, or been stretched by us, and that they are inspired to keep working and to keep finding things” (Zubrzycki, 2010a).

Beyond this pedagogical work, a large component of the group’s work is devoted to social and charitable projects in both Poland and abroad. The majority of this work is done through Bral and Zubrzycki’s close relationship with the charity, Rokpa International. Established in 1980 by Wyler and Rinpoche, and with its strongest presence in Tibet, Nepal, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, the organization is dedicated to providing essential

support to people in need, regardless of religion or race. Understanding that the most effective help can only come from within each individual and community, Rokpa seeks to enable individuals to become confident, empowered, and self-sufficient. To this end, the charity not only provides vital help by offering food, shelter, education, vocational training, and medical assistance, but actively protects different communities' cultural heritage by promoting and preserving their unique traditions, languages, and artistic practices. Zubrzycki notes that Rokpa's work is therefore dedicated to programmes that help people maintain these vital elements of their cultural identity. As she explains, this work is not simply through the "presentation of artistic forms. Culture is a person's humanity, as well, and a sense of belonging to a place and to a group" (Zubrzycki, 2008).

This is an understanding which underpins Bral and Zubrzycki's own work. Over the years, they have both become involved heavily in the charity's activities, establishing the first Polish branch of Rokpa International in Lublin in 1995 before registering it in Wrocław in 2006. In partnership with Rokpa, Bral and Zubrzycki have organised countless programmes and projects in Poland. They have established soup kitchens in Lublin, Szczecin, and Wrocław, each of which can feed one hundred to 150 people a day during the winter months. Bral has instigated a programme called Grandparents-Grandchildren (Dziadkowie-Wnukowie), in which children visit the elderly in their residence or care homes and simply spend time together, and has led regular music workshops with children from World of Hope (Świat Nadziei), an organization that provides support for mentally disabled children. Additionally, he has devoted time to directing performances for homeless and orphaned children at Rokpa's Children's Home, in Kathmandu, which were performed in Nepal and in Switzerland in honour of the organisation's twenty-fifth anniversary. Zubrzycki herself is an active member of Rokpa's monitoring team, travelling to schools,

clinics, orphanages, and care homes in order to assess the charity's work, and to ensure that assistance is finding the people who need it most.

### **Brave Festival**

While all of this work is a large component of Bral and Zubrzycki's own personal activities, they have extended their own level of social engagement into the work with Song of the Goat. This culminates in the Brave Festival: Against Cultural Exile, an annual festival initiated in 2005. Produced under the name of Song of the Goat, the development of this festival has been driven largely by Bral. The group itself always performs during the festival and the actors are most often available to help where necessary, but the organization, planning, and production of the event itself is shaped by Bral and administered by separate staff headed most recently by Festival Director Anastazja Gołaj.

The idea behind the Brave Festival is to bring together artists from marginalized and often devastated communities who maintain strong links to their own cultural and artistic traditions, and fight to protect their own sense of identity in the face of globalization, social and cultural exclusion, and war. Drawing artists from communities such as the Tuareg of North Africa, peasant women from Ukraine, the Wagogo people of Tanzania, women from the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, the Fulani tribe of West Africa, disadvantaged youth from Uganda, and Berber women of Morocco, Brave focuses on artists who "express the wisdom of their people through their works" (A. Gołaj, 2010: 237) and practice their cultural and artistic traditions not as static cultural forms, but as living traditions that contribute actively to the social lives of their individual communities.

The festival emphasizes cultural and artistic forms that are rooted deeply in the identity and lives of people around the world. Brave's promotional material describes that it is "a festival not about works of art, but about art through which it is possible to address

the problem of dying traditions, forgotten identity and spirituality of ancient cultures, cultural minorities and values which have been rejected, sold or destroyed”. In this way, Brave acts as a unique forum in which people from diverse social, cultural, economic and religious backgrounds can come together and learn from each other, which aims to provide a space in which these communities can celebrate their cultural heritage, meet one another, and discuss their work, lives, and cultures in the hopes of forging new relationships based on respect and compassion.

The title and theme of the festival varies each year. The early festivals focused primarily on music, exploring endangered musical traditions from around the world in *Magic Voices* (2005), *Asian Voices* (2006), and *Drowned Songs* (2007). More recent festivals, however, have sought to examine more complicated issues such as ritual, in *Rituals: Out of Africa* (2007), worship and religion, in the case of *Prayers of the World* (2009), and the potency and magic of the enchanted word, such as *Enchanters* (2010). Approaching these topics through the voices of diverse communities and their unique traditions, Brave provides a rare opportunity for the artists and audiences to consider more deeply their own perceptions, judgments, and understandings of not only other people and the way in which they live their lives, but of themselves and their own personal choices. As Bral notes, the festival should offer a way in which to “experience mentalities and viewpoints totally different to our own and through this experience to ask questions about our own identity” (Brave Festival, 2009: 12).

This open attitude of curiosity and respect is built into the very structure of the festival. Since the 2006 edition, the festival has donated the proceeds from its ticket sales directly to Rokpa International. The proceeds alone from the 2007 festival provided education, shelter, food, and medical support to thirty Tibetan orphans for an entire year. Later editions have raised approximately €10,000 each year, which are contributed to

Rokpa's general emergency funds (Brave Festival, 2009: 155). In the case of the 2010 Festival, the festival proceeds contributed directly to the urgent rescue efforts and reconstruction in Yushu, a region in the Chinese province of Qinghai with 97 percent of the population of Tibetan origin that was devastated in an earthquake earlier that spring.

In addition to this charity work, the festival regularly organizes donations from audience members, such as clothing, shoes, and other personal items, or the sale of locally made jewelry, masks, and other art, to send back to the artists' communities, which are often struggling or destitute. Women, who came from Tanzania in 2008 performing ritual music of the Muheme female initiation rites, had never before left their village. They were extremely poor, even by Tanzanian standards, and were barely able to send their children to school. They worried that the man who brought them to Poland was going to sell them into slavery. On their journey to the festival, they climbed stairs, rode an escalator, and flew in an airplane for the first time.

Throughout Brave, these women were extremely present. They attended other artists' concerts and performances, met with artists from Sub-Saharan Africa, Uganda, and Poland, and communicated with eager and curious audience members through gestures and smiles since there was no common language. When they returned home, they left with boxes of personal items donated to the women's communities by audience members. Their travels had drawn the Tanzanian government's attention and, with that support, they have since been able to establish their own community centre in their village in order to help teach their children Tanzanian traditions and culture. Additionally, these women have organized their own festival that celebrates cultures from their particular region of Tanzania (A. Gołaj, 2010: 241).

In another situation, a teenager from Uganda who was performing in the 2009 festival was not able to go to school because his family could not afford it. While in Poland,



he found a sponsor, ensuring that he would be able to complete his education back home.

Situations such as these develop as a simple result of people from different countries

becoming involved in each others' lives. Gołaj observes that

what the guests see here, in Poland, will often be the first image of the outside world that they see in their lives. The awareness of this fact is a serious obligation. We do not want this visit to have a negative effect on our guests' perception of their home. In fact, what we intend is the opposite effect. (A. Gołaj, 2010: 241)

What she indicates here is a significant. One component of the festival – called Brave Kids, which will be introduced shortly – brings children from diverse backgrounds and countries to Wrocław in order to meet one another and prepare a performance together. Most of the children have never left home before, and, for Gołaj, it is vital that these children are given an opportunity to learn about other cultures, but that they may learn to celebrate and be proud of their *own* cultures.

This is a fundamental component of Brave Festival. Bral stresses that the festival must not in any way cross a line into either exoticizing foreign cultures, or idealizing others – particularly he is not interested in promoting the Western world as 'progressive' and therefore 'better'. Bral has been equally explicit in saying that Brave Festival is not about 'art as a social tool'; in this respect, he shies away from politicizing the festival. Instead, he is interested in simply creating meetings. By providing a space in which people may celebrate their own songs, dances, ceremonies, prayers, and poems, Brave ultimately attempts to empower individuals to embrace their own beliefs, perspectives, and world views while accepting those of others.<sup>76</sup>

This is as important for the audiences as it is for the artists. Bral asserts: "The positive sense of community generated in a festival not only results in a sense of common understanding and dignity amongst the artists who perform at the festival but also

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<sup>76</sup> This information is compiled from personal communication with Bral in July 2011.

transforms all of us here in Wrocław” (Brave Festival, 2009: 13). Due to Poland’s history of isolation, Polish audiences have had little exposure to the world outside. Brave is therefore a rare and unique opportunity for Poles to meet people from distant lands and to challenge stereotypes. As Gołaj notes, “Our country is predominantly monocultural and tends not to be open to otherness. What we often see in foreign guests is only a different skin colour, a strange language, or incomprehensible customs and behaviour” (A. Gołaj, 2010: 242).

While this mentality could cause the festival to slip into exoticism, she continues by saying that

by creating the Brave Festival we wanted to contribute to meetings between people, encourage dialogue...and to encourage Poles to seek similarities and sources of community in other cultures and people. We try to incite benevolent curiosity, and encourage questions – partly because a person asked about his or her tradition, history and culture will begin to talk about them with pride. (ibid.)

Rather than emphasize any kind of universal concept of humanity, Brave seeks to highlight the simple fact that we are all people, leading our lives in very different ways, and to raise awareness of these differences such that we may all be able to approach each other with respect, tolerance, and understanding.

A vital component to the Brave Festival is the commitment to children. For Bral, the support of children is “the most incredible, skilful method of changing the world” (Bral, 2009). By providing education, health, stability, and love to a child, the possibility of experiencing a wider sense of belonging, pride in oneself, respect for others, responsibility and positive contribution to one’s community increases manifold. As mentioned previously, a recent addition to the Brave Festival has been created specifically for children.

Called Brave Kids, this project runs alongside the main festival in Wrocław, and dedicates itself to groups who support children who have been abandoned and made

homeless by disease, genocide, war, and other devastating social, economic, and political situations. Empowering these children through the practice of their own cultural and artistic heritage, Brave Kids brings together children from Rwanda, Uganda, Nepal, Zimbabwe, Norway, Sweden, Chechen refugees living in Poland, and from Wrocław itself, in order that they may meet each other in an environment of mutual respect and compassion. By giving them the opportunity to express and share that which makes them unique, teaching each other, and working collaboratively on a new performance, Brave Kids attempts to provide children with a positive and influential experience of the world.<sup>77</sup>

The 2009 pilot programme of Brave Kids brought together children from Breakdance Project Uganda, a project that teaches break-dancing to people of all ages, professions, races, and religions, Rokpa's Children's Home in Nepal, where orphans and street kids are provided with shelter, food, education, and medicine in a supportive and nurturing environment, and disadvantaged children from Wrocław itself. Children from Mizero, an organization in Rwanda that provides support for children whose families have been lost in the genocide, were also invited, but unfortunately were unable to attend due to problems with their passports and visas.<sup>78</sup> Despite this, the group totalled seventeen children ranging from eight to eighteen. For ten days, the children taught each other break-dance, Nepali dances, Polish words, and learned how to juggle, walk on stilts, and, using all of these elements, constructed a performance together that was eventually performed at the finale of the festival.

While the children from Nepal and Uganda spoke English, the Polish children did not, and so the group spent the first days learning how to communicate with each other. However, the children took it upon themselves to learn each other's languages, using

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<sup>77</sup> Based on personal observations as a volunteer with Brave Kids pilot programme during Brave Festival 2009.

<sup>78</sup> The same children were finally able to attend the 2010 edition of Brave Kids.

gestures and requesting notebooks and pens to record the new things they learned every day. Although the organizers led games and other workshops to spark the children's imagination, it was the children who led the project – a random dance class starting in the corner of the room during a break, or a passing affectionate embrace as one child walked past another. By the end of the project, a real family had formed; the children were distraught and reluctant to leave, and kept finding excuses to stay with each other for a little while longer for one more song, or one more hug. They promised to visit each other in Uganda or Nepal, planned return trips to Poland, took photos, held each others' hands, and cried freely.

Due to extremely supportive leaders, most of these children have managed to stay in contact with each other, largely through Facebook. The project, however, was the least successful – and the most necessary – for the children from Poland. While the Ugandan and Nepali children came from significantly difficult political and familial situations, there were organisations in both of these countries to support them. In Poland, however, the festival organisers were unable to convince any already existing organisations to participate in the project, eventually appealing to individual families through various church support groups. The three girls who joined the project spoke no English and did not know each other. They were much more shy and embarrassed, less willing to participate, and took more time to warm to the others. After a full ten days, however, all three girls had crushes on the Ugandan boys, had become excellent friends with one of the older Nepali girls, and were laughing, teasing, and playing along with the rest of the group.

It is experiences such as these which can change the course of a young child's life by teaching them to be curious, accepting, and compassionate towards others. For Gołaj, Brave Kids is about a series of questions:

What should be done to enable children from different countries to meet and talk as often as possible? How can we show them the beauty of Poland, but at the same time reinforce their sense of belonging to their own culture and admiration of it, so that they can feel proud of who they are? (A. Gołaj, 2010: 245)

By offering children this kind of experience, they may then be able to continue shaping a world built not on prejudice and discrimination, but on openness and understanding.

This mentality is strongly supported by Bral's underlying view that these essential connections that bind people together in a relationship of compassion are rapidly disappearing. Perhaps an understanding that has carried through from his time with Gardzienice, Bral asserts that, through greed, lust, and an obsession with material culture, human beings are losing the link to their heritage, their identity, their communities, and to the natural world (Bral, 2010b).

This is a phenomenon discussed by Tönnies, as discussed in Chapter One, whose theory of *Gemeinschaft* rests heavily on the relationships between people, in addition to the mutually assigned value of these relationships and the resulting construction of economy and law based on strong ties between people engaged in trade. The system of *Gemeinschaft*, therefore, is based on human connection, on reciprocal dependence, respect and understanding. By contrast, society, or *Gesellschaft*, has been outlined earlier in this study as a highly impersonal system driven by production and consumption, where direct person-to-person contact is removed, replaced instead by middle-men, convenience, and mass production. According to Tönnies, industrialization has allowed the ties that bind us together in personal relationships with others to dissolve.

A similar understanding has driven Bral and Zubrzycki, who have constantly guided *Song of the Goat's* work towards an honest engagement with the world, seeking to combat the forces that isolate and alienate us by focusing on the cultural and social material that binds us to the world and gives our lives meaning. Bral explains: "For me, these customs,

rituals, and understanding of energy are the essence of humanity. ...If we lose this for the sake of the material world, for the sake of...fulfilling our desires, then we are absolutely lost” (Bral, 2010b).

Song of the Goat has therefore devoted its entire body of work – from its training, research, devising, and performing, to its teaching and charity work – to uncovering the various ways in which people maintain strong links to their own identities, communities, and traditions. Emphasizing the relationships between people and the cultural material that shapes their identities through the practice of coordination, the group searches constantly to establish new ways through which people may connect to each other and develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. By dedicating itself to the exploration of a profound experience of interconnection with the world through deeply rooted personal, cultural, and spiritual material, whether through the actor’s craft, or through the ancient laments of the women of Epirus, Song of the Goat attempts to restore these lost connections and ultimately to help generate a meaningful sense of community and compassion in the world.

## Conclusion

The three performing groups discussed in this study demonstrate a strong dedication to investigating and reinvigorating the social relationships that bind people together in community. It is clear that the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat's work has developed idiosyncratically, with each group evolving as an artistic community in its own right, following its own vision, and shaping its artistic practice in relation to the way it engages with the world.

As outlined, because each group's individual members are committed fully to the life and activities of the group, they not only shape the life of their group, but constantly reinforce its self-definition through their active involvement in its activities. To call upon Bourdieu's term, all three of these performing groups maintain their own unique habitus, which shapes the way in which they not only perceive the world, but function in it. The members' continued participation in and dedication to the individual lives of these performing groups has in fact strengthened the existence of these groups, and contributed directly to their perpetual – and singular – evolution.

Despite their differences, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat equally represent the continuation of a wider artistic context, rooted in an understanding that art has the potential to challenge and empower people to think critically about the beliefs and opinions they might take for granted, and provide a space in which people may connect more deeply, openly, and honestly not only within themselves, but to others. Building upon a long line of artistic work, from the Romantic poetry of Mickiewicz and Słowacki, and the later neo-Romantic vision of Wyspiański, to Osterwa and Limanowski's work with Reduta, and Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre, the performing groups at the centre of this study blur

the boundaries between artistic practice and social life by engaging consciously with the people and the environments around them.

As groups working within a laboratory theatre tradition, there are strong commonalities between the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat's work. All three incorporate a rigorous approach to training that focuses on the complete physical, social, emotional, imaginative, and psychic development of the performer. They devise their performances collaboratively – each guided by a director with a driving artistic vision for the work. Pedagogy and research are another similarity, as all three groups engage with artists, practitioners, students, and scholars to further investigate, supplement, and contextualise their artistic practice.

Finally, all three groups have pushed their work beyond the borders of theatre, reaching into the social world through barbers, expeditions, festivals, and charity work in an attempt to better understand the diverse traditions, cultures, beliefs, relationships, and practices that contribute to our co-existence as social beings. As outlined in Bakhtin's proposals regarding the reciprocal nature of communication, exchanges and interactions such as barbers and expeditions have the potential to generate a deeper mutual understanding for both groups, shaping and reshaping their ways of perceiving the world through the interaction.

This deliberate construction of communication has significant implications. According to Bakhtin's theory, signs – the means through which communication occurs – shape our consciousness, thereby suggesting that interaction itself has the potential to adapt and transform consciousness. In his own words:

Signs emerge, after all, only in the process of interaction between one individual consciousness and another. ...Consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently only in the process of social interaction. (Vološinov, 1973: 11)



This is particularly pertinent to the Odin's barbers and Gardzienice's expeditions, as Song of the Goat has a different relationship – that will be discussed shortly – with the encounters it instigates. As discussed during the examination of the Odin and Gardzienice's work, a potential danger with both the barbers and with the expeditions is that, by instigating encounters with vulnerable communities, these groups inadvertently determine the conditions in which that interaction will take place. No matter how benign their motives, this necessitates the reassertion of a power structure in which the artists from the 'civilized' world reach out to those 'uncivilized', calling into play issues of cultural appropriation and exoticism.

A key to understanding the way in which the Odin and Gardzienice approach these encounters lies in the groups' own self-perception. One significant commonality is that they have been founded as artistic communities that in some way exist outside the more 'accepted' mainstream. For Barba and Staniewski, both directors have established their work away from the cities and, in doing so, have made a strong statement with regards to their place in the social world. They are artistic exiles (or renegades, as they might like to see it) that have established themselves and their artistic practices on their own terms, in their own isolated spaces, in a way they see fit. A component of their own self-definition is that of a community that exists on the margins.

As discussed in Chapter Three, it is unquestionable that the minority groups with which these companies interact are socially, ethnically, and culturally defined communities. They have their own sense of history and religious faith; they have ancestors and traditions, myths, heroes, and gods; they have land – whether owned or revoked. They have a sense of cultural belonging. How can one place the Odin and Gardzienice alongside this? They are artistic communities: associative collections of people who have chosen to work together,

who share a vision of art and life. But they are not what Shevtsova defines as ‘ethno-social’ groups (Shevtsova, 2002: 116).

This issue is difficult to resolve. If we accept that these performing groups understand themselves as minority groups, or as groups that are in some way outside mainstream society, then it may follow then that their interactions with ethno-social groups are somehow on level ground. But is this view defensible? From one point of view these interactions may embody a pervading imbalance of power that lies dangerously close to “reduc[ing] everything to the perspective of the target culture, which is in the dominant position and turn[ing] the alien culture to its own ends” (Pavis, 1996: 11).

The only productive way to negotiate these challenges, I believe, is two-fold. Firstly, it is vital that artists themselves are conscious of these issues and dedicated to performing their work with the immense delicacy that is required when working with ethno-social communities. This includes work not only with vulnerable or marginalized groups, but truly with any social group involved by artists in a wider artistic scheme. Real ethical situations arise when dealing with people and their lives, their beliefs, their opinions, and their environments.<sup>79</sup>

Secondly, for the purposes of this particular study, the way in which these performing groups understand and practice their own position in relation to the world must be considered. All three of the groups at the centre of this study consciously interact with ethnically and culturally diverse communities. While their attempts are certainly imperfect, it can be argued that the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat are – at the very least – sensitive to the wider issues surrounding their more socially engaged work. This is evidenced in Barba’s own writings, in Staniewski’s careful and strict rules of the

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<sup>79</sup> Helen Nicholson’s book, *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* is particularly illuminating with regards to ongoing artistic work with communities. See: Helen Nicholson (2005) *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*, Theatre and Performance Practices, gen. eds. Graham Ley and Jane Milling, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan

expeditions, and in Bral's uncompromising attitude in producing the Brave Festival.

Although their awareness does not excuse or negate the difficult ethical questions raised by their work, it is important for the larger body of theatre research, to understand and situate their work as performing groups who are pushing the boundaries of theatre in an attempt to uncover deeper access to open, honest dialogue between diverse groups of people. As Helen Nicholson asserts, the important thing in artistic work with communities is not "not to *give* participants a voice – with all the hierarchical implications that phrase invokes – but to create spaces and places that enable the participants' voices to be heard" (Nicholson, 2005: 163). Perhaps to some extent what matter is even the *attempt* to engage on even footing.

As mentioned previously, the situation for Song of the Goat is slightly different. While the group has undertaken expeditions – an important component of *Chronicles* and *Lacrimosa* – and puts significant weight in travelling and interacting with diverse communities around the world, their artistic work very much evolves independently of these encounters. These meetings are opportunities for the actors to learn about the world and experience it in new ways, rather than the more socially oriented artistic endeavours of the Odin's barbers, or the socially informed creative development of Gardzienice's performances.

This is emphasized by an almost distinct line Song of the Goat draws between its own artistic explorations in training and rehearsal, and its social projects such as theatre workshops with children from minority communities around Wrocław. Brave Festival is an example on a significantly larger scale, inasmuch as it exists as its own entity. The actors are involved with it as performers and audience members, and only on an organizational level if they desire. For this reason, Song of the Goat's work seems to avoid the ethical concerns that the work of the Odin and, to a lesser extent, Gardzienice, raises.

As these groups search for new ways to create dialogues between diverse groups of people, a significant commonality in their work is a commitment to the unmediated experience of connection through performance. As such, they have constructed artistic practices that do not attempt to dictate interpretation to their audiences, either in a performance setting or in the groups' more diverse methods of interaction. Rather, to draw on Nicholson's quote cited above, their work is grounded in a desire to create a space where meetings may occur, actively giving responsibility to audiences so that they may form their own opinions. In speaking of her work, Zubrzycki notes of the audience:

They go with what they want. I would just like to have the possibility of immersing them into my world as best I can, to have the conditions available for them to be taken into the stream of what we want to give them. That's all. And what they go away with, I don't know. It's up to them. (Zubrzycki, 2008)

For *Song of the Goat*, the actors intentionally weave sounds, images, actions, and emotions, asking audiences to engage not solely with the text or with any defined 'meaning', but instead with a full-body experience of the visceral world of the performance.

The Odin and Gardzienice's work can be understood similarly. As discussed in Chapter Three, Barba and the Odin layer images, movements, sounds, text, and objects, composing performances that seem to avoid any concrete level of interpretation. What is most important for the Odin is that the actors develop their skills to such a degree that they may command their presence as performers, drawing the audience into the action on stage. Barba elaborates: "It is neither important to *understand* one another nor to *transmit* something identical to everyone. What is important is to construct the bridge [between the actors and the audience], to discover the relationships, to create other relationships, to *put* into action, to *permit* a reaction" (Barba, 1986: 110).

The full body of Gardzienice's own performance work presents contrasting worlds of beauty and the grotesque, joy and pain, humour and despair with an intention to heighten

the audience's engagement through a continual play of oppositions. Scenes blend into one another as the actors establish pristine vocal and physical landscapes before collapsing into crude behaviour and rough language. As Hodge specifies, Gardzienice's work draws on "the basic human urge for personal and collective transcendence through theatre" (Staniewski and Hodge, 2004: 1).

The creation of theatre work as experience is strengthened by each group's approach to actor training. Building on the training practices developed by Osterwa, with the assistance of Limanowski, and Grotowski, these three performing groups attempt to access the very humanity of each performer in order to compose more powerful, and truthful, connections with their audience. Drawing on deep and often vulnerable elements from the performers' own lives – from memories and experiences to images, fears, associations, and behaviour – the actors seek to open themselves in the presence of an audience to evoke honest engagement.

The ability to express emotion, to share one's imagination and desires, to open oneself to others and to reveal one's self in the presence of others are all vital components in the act of 'responsive' understanding, to draw on the discussion of Bakhtin in Chapter One. Moments of shared vulnerability are a display of immense trust between people, allowing people to relate to each other on a deeper level, opening themselves to each other more fully. By creating theatre in which the actors themselves investigate and express their own vulnerabilities, physicalities, imaginations, and emotions, the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat ask the audience to do the same in order to encounter each other not only through a shared artistic experience, but through a more profound experience of what it means to be human.

As ensembles who integrate their performance practices so strongly into not only their lives, but into their wider sociopolitical environments, the Odin, Gardzienice, and

Song of the Goat's artistic practices have adapted in relation to the world around them. This is most evident in Gardzienice's work, as this company has weathered significant shifts in the Polish sociopolitical climate over its more than thirty years of practice. While their artistic transformation has had much to do with changes in the company's own life as a group, it is also emblematic of wider social, cultural, and artistic issues within post-communist Poland today.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Gardzienice's earlier performances developed under the extremely turbulent sociopolitical conditions of communist Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. Travelling to neglected ethnic and cultural communities within Poland, and allowing their work to emerge directly through those interactions, Gardzienice's performances during this period raised vital issues concerning the lives of these suppressed communities, in addition to emphasising the multiplicity of cultural traditions and practices in Poland. As Filipowicz observes, Gardzienice's work at this time "stresse[d] the indeterminacy of the stage world and thus reflect[ed] a parallel uncertainty of values, morals, and social norms in the world of the spectator" (Filipowicz, 1987: 161).

With the collapse of the Polish communist government in 1989, the social, cultural, political, economic, and artistic world in Poland faced dramatic changes. As indicated in Chapter Two, at this time Poland faced its second period of drastic reconstruction, calling upon its experience immediately following the dissolution of the partitions. Once again, Poland entered a process of recreating itself as an autonomous nation, rebuilding its economy, restructuring its foreign and domestic policies. More than twenty years on, now as members of NATO (since 1999) and the European Union (since 2004), Poland, as a democratic nation, is participating in a current restructuring of Central and Eastern Europe (Galasińska and Galasiński, 2010: 8).

This transition, however, has by no means been easy or smooth. Despite the benefits of a free market, capitalism has also drastically increased unemployment. Galasińska writes:

A great number of the population was pushed out of the workforce at the same time when a recreated private sector as well as newly established foreign investments couldn't cope with an influx of people looking for employment. Disillusion and nostalgia came quickly after great euphoria...The almost immediate winning of public political and electoral support of former Communists only underscored the fact that Central and Eastern European citizens had not expected the realities of the changes of 1989. Nor did they have experience of how to cope with such shifts, which did not exist in community's memories of a critical economic crisis. For the first time in their lives my informants faced the reality where unemployment, uncertain social and political future, severe lack of financial means, unstable social security systems including the collapse of pension scheme and short period of job seekers benefit payments, became a norm, and an everyday experience for many (Galasińska and Galasiński, 2010: 191-192).

A consequence of this was an increased reliance on anything that provided stability. As Filipowicz succinctly describes, this situation “engendered a nostalgia for certainty and security – for the static closure of a mythic Polishness, which would provide a reassuring shelter from flux” (Filipowicz, 1995: 123).

In the last twenty years, Filipowicz has written extensively on this topic, providing a necessary discourse on the continuing issues that surround the development of a ‘Polish’ national and cultural identity. In the mid-2000s, she expands her discussion of the increasing ‘mythic’ construction of Polish identity:

[P]ost-communist Poland has embraced predominantly nonliberal values, as evidenced by the imposition of religious instruction in public schools and by restrictions on divorce and women's reproductive rights. What has emerged from the quiet revolution in Poland, then, is a very traditional culture rooted in religious fundamentalism, patriarchal mythology, and exclusivist ethnonationalism. (Filipowicz, 2004: 167)

As this quote indicates, the new conception of Polish identity directly ignores not only the multiplicity of ethnicities and cultures that once comprised a significant component of Polish culture, but streamlines alternative views that are perhaps contrary to this ‘monolithic’ and almost sacred understanding of ‘Polishness’. Filipowicz again proves

invaluable in understanding this wider polemic. She argues: “Anything that challenges the self-image of Polish exceptionalism is viewed as an affront to Polish pride and therefore meets with indignation and denial” (Filipowicz, 2004: 167).<sup>80</sup>

This creates a difficult situation for the continued development of innovative cultural and artistic practices in Poland. With the significant dissolution of state funding for theatres in Poland, artists are now finding themselves at the mercy of audiences.<sup>81</sup> As Filipowicz demands in an earlier essay: “What is...the scope of artistic freedom when one faces pressures not only of authorities but of audiences as well?” (Filipowicz, 1992: 79)

Elżbieta Baniewicz makes a point to note that one of the largest difficulties is restructuring – or dissolving – the old paradigms shaped by years of oppression. She observes:

Theatre itself, now that Poland has democratic state institutions, does not have to fulfill any substitute functions. The role of actors in the past, carrying out the mission of free speech even if this was expressed using Aesop’s language, has diminished. They are simply and only actors. The audience no longer throws flowers onto the stage in gratitude for the actors’ moral stance, as was the case under martial law. (Baniewicz, 1996: 468)

This raises the question of how the Polish theatres in the present study are negotiating these changes, whether their artistic practice has developed in relation to perceptions of Polish identity in Poland today, and how their activities are changing in the current sociopolitical environment.

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<sup>80</sup> For a selection of scholars dealing with this issue in English, see: Elwira M. Grossman (ed.) (2002) *Studies in Language, Literature and Cultural Mythology in Poland: Investigating ‘The Other’*, Slavic Studies Vol. 7, Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press; Elżbieta Baniewicz (1996) ‘Theatre’s Lean Years in Free Poland’, *Theatre Journal* 48:4, pp. 461-478; Aleksandra Galasińska and Dariusz Galasiński (ed.) (2010) *The Post-Communist Condition: Public and private discourse of transformation*, Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture (DAPSAC), series ed. Ruth Wodak and Greg Myers, Amsterdam: John Benjamins In Polish, see specifically Maria Janion (1995) ‘Czy bedziesz wiedział, co przeżyłeś’ in *Literatura i demokracja: Bezpieczne i niebezpieczne związki*, Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, pp. 121-129.

<sup>81</sup> The issue of privatisation and loss of state funding for Polish theatres is widely raised by theatre scholars. See for example: Elżbieta Baniewicz (1996) ‘Theatre’s Lean Years in Free Poland’, *Theatre Journal* 48:4, pp. 461-478; and Halina Filipowicz (1995) ‘Demythologizing Polish Theatre’, *The Drama Review* 39:1, pp. 122-128.



As discussed previously, neither Gardzienice nor Song of the Goat understand their work as explicitly political and, in this sense, neither company has directly challenged or commented on the current nature and development of identity in Poland. For Gardzienice, the group's recent performances focuses largely on exploring ritual and ecstasy, an area that – as yet – seems to have little direct relation to the current social climate in Poland. Within a wider artistic and sociocultural framework, however, Staniewski and the actors are dedicating increased efforts to the training of young actors, actively creating a new generation of artists who may continue to contribute to the evolution and progression of theatre as an integrated life practice.

In this respect, many of the group's students are incorporated into the company itself, leading to a rotating cast of new actors for their performances. Additionally, the influence Gardzienice has had on developing practices can be seen in the diverse theatre companies that have been formed by its students and former members. Besides Song of the Goat, others include Borowski's Studium Teatralne, Rodowicz's Chorea, Teatr Węgajty, Teatr ZAR, and, outside of Poland, Double Edge Theatre.

It is significant that the young actors being trained by Gardzienice – most of whom are Polish – do not have direct memories of life under communism. To emphasize this point, Cioffi quotes the director of theatre company Biuro Podróży, Paweł Szkotak, who says:

The events of 1989 changed the situation in Poland. ...Theatre became popular as a means of expression for a younger generation whose past had never been connected with oppositional politics. We are not engaged in a fight with Communism or any other political school. (Cioffi, 2005: 81)

As a result, Gardzienice's pedagogical programme is exposing these young actors to a their wealth of knowledge, training, and research, and helping them gain the tools necessary for

their own artistic explorations in their future contributions in creating a new landscape for Polish theatre.

Finally, Gardzienice's recent designation as a European Centre for Theatre Practices will no doubt result in more changes in the group's work, although this is most likely to cause an increased focus on education and research rather than a fundamental shift in content. Because details remain unclear as yet, it remains to be seen how this change will affect the group's continuing practice.

In the case of *Song of the Goat*, an implicit commentary on the state of the modern 'progressive' world underlines the group's artistic practice. This is emphasized by Bral's conviction that contemporary society is in grave danger of irrevocably losing cultural and artistic traditions of diverse and marginalized communities around the world. While this concern does not directly enter their performance discourse, it is interwoven into the performances through the musical traditions, legends and mythology, symbols and imagery, and physical forms they explore.

The Brave Festival demonstrates a more direct engagement with the sociopolitical climate in Poland. By inviting artists from around the world to share their artistic, cultural, and spiritual traditions, Brave provides a vital opportunity for people in Poland to witness, experience, and learn from these diverse communities. As mentioned previously, Bral is not interested in politicizing these meetings. He insists that Brave is not about 'art for social change'. Instead, the festival must only provide a space for these meetings, where people may encounter one another in an environment – carefully constructed by Bral and the Brave organizational team – to be one of open discussion and sharing of knowledge.

Like Gardzienice, *Song of the Goat* is in a process of change. In January 2010, Bral accepted the position of Artistic Director at the Studio Theatre in Warsaw, where he based his work until only recently. In March 2012, he announced his permanent return to

Wrocław. Although his dedication to Song of the Goat remained strong during his two-year period in Warsaw, his time was divided between the necessary organisation, planning, and directing for his new repertory theatre, and the continuing work of Song of the Goat. His recent return will no doubt bring certain restructuring within the company, which as yet cannot be anticipated. The group's newest project, scheduled to be taken to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2012, is a choral exploration of *King Lear*.

Since 2010, the members of Song of the Goat have continued to return to Wrocław for performances of *Macbeth* and for the beginning of a new MA programme. They also continued to lead workshops, tour with *Macbeth*, and are taking the initial steps towards the development of new performance material. Zubrzycki continues to oversee the MA programme and has also taken over Bral's position as Artistic Director of the Brave Festival, which continues to garner wider attention and acclaim. This has been enhanced by its inclusion in Wrocław's bid for European Cultural Capital of 2016, a bid which the city recently won. It remains to be seen how these developments, including Bral's recent return to Wrocław, will affect the future development of the group's work.

It is perhaps quite apparent that Barba and the Odin's relationship to Poland is significantly different. Barba's own connection to Poland has always been through Grotowski and, although he periodically returns to present work at the Grotowski Institute, the current issues within the country are not within his scope of work. In fact, while the group continues to create artistic projects, their life as an active and innovative performance group is slowly coming to a close. In almost fifty years of practice, the group has progressed from its early existence as an isolated artistic enclave to an engaged and active member of a wider artistic community. As indicated in Chapter Three, this had much to do with the Odin's development of barbers in the 1970s, which opened their performance practice directly into the larger world. Since then, the group has incorporated a significant

range of practices, concepts, and events into its work, which it continues to develop and research to this day.

Barba and the Odin are still creating new performances, their most recent entitled *The Chronic Life*, premiering in September 2011. Although they are still making work, the group's energies have undeniably shifted over the years. Their attention has turned largely to the exploration and application of their already established practice, rather than actively forging new theatrical territories as it did in its earlier years. The greatest portion of the group's work therefore rests in their existence as a cultural and artistic centre in Holstebro. Organising workshops, work demonstrations, introductory training for curious actors, and local community events, the Odin continues its life as a group by openly sharing the knowledge, practices, and techniques the members have accumulated over time.

Ultimately, the performance practices of the Odin, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat demonstrate a strong belief in theatre as a shared, dialectic experience that may enable us to better understand the world in which we live. With artistic practice as a fundamental component of the way in which they both shape and live their lives, the members of these groups create performances that seek to provide opportunities for audiences – in addition to the other communities with which they engage – to examine the social material that contributes to their lives and connects them in community. Despite the criticisms and challenges their work faces, the diverse practices of these three groups indicate an attempt to create performance as a shared experience of what it means to be human.

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